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**“COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND  
BE MY LOVE.”**

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*Robert Buchanan*





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“COME, LIVE WITH ME,  
AND BE MY LOVE”

AN ENGLISH PASTORAL

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF

“GOD AND THE MAN,” “THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD,” ETC.

Come, live with me, and be my Love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dale and field,  
And all the craggy mountains yield.

There will we sit upon the rocks,  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

*The Passionate Shepherd.*

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

NEW YORK

LOVELL, CORYELL & COMPANY

43, 45 AND 47 EAST 10TH STREET

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# “COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE.”

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## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE HAYFIELD.

There grew two roses in the light—  
Hey the wind and the weather!  
And one was red, and one was white,  
And they shone in the sun together!—*Old Song.*

“TCHIK! That went down rarely! Thy turn next,  
Amandy!”

“Cannikin’s empty!”

“Then take a buss instead!”

She held up her mouth to his, and a loud “smack” followed. Then, cushioned softly on the sweet-smelling hay, Jabez Doyle lay back and closed his eyes.

“Now, I’ll ha’ a snooze,” he said.

“Wake up, ye dumbledore!” she cried, shaking him.

6 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"I'm dreaming o' thee, Amandy!"

"Dreaming o' rubbish!"

"Oh, how I love 'ee! Say, you—when is it to be?"

"What?"

"As if ye doan't know! Me and you and passon" (nudging her with his elbow, but still lying with his eyes shut). "Eh?"

"I'm goan back to my work," said Amandy, rising.

"No you bean't!" answered Jabez, springing up and throwing the loose hay over her while she puffed and gasped for breath. "Haw! haw! haw!"

"Ye great vule! I'm choking!" she cried, administering a box on the ear strong enough to fell an ox.

It was the noontide siesta. Jabez Doyle, labourer, and Amanda Jane Thistlewaite, farm-servant, had stolen away to the corner of the five-acre field to eat their bread and cheese and empty their cannikins of thin ale. Both were tanned red with the sun—Jabez the lean, with his powerful bony frame and perpetual grin; Amanda the stout, built in the ample mould of the Amazon, but sleepy-eyed and good-tempered as one of her own cows. Jabez was in his shirt-sleeves, without coat or waistcoat, and with an old billycock

perched on his shaggy brown hair ; Amanda wore a white cotton gown with blue flowers worked upon it, and swung her great sun-bonnet in her hand. An ash-tree spread its shade above and around them, and the brook or rivulet which fringed the field ran clear and shallow at their feet.

All round, the perfumed fields and meadows swimming in the mists of summer heat. Warm stillness everywhere, as if the heart of Nature had almost ceased to beat. Far off, at the farther side of the five-acre, a half-laden wain, with men and women sheltering in its shade.

"Gie me thy hand, Amandy. I want to measure thy finger."

"Shannot"; then, after hesitating, "what for?"

"Why, for ring, surely ! 'If you'll ha' me, and I'll ha' *you*, no knife can cut our love in two."

"Let be. I'll tell Sam Wood !"

"And I'll punch Sam's head !"

"*You* ? He could lick 'ee with one hand."

But she grinned, and let her fat finger rest in her lover's horny palm. Suddenly she started, and drew it away. A white gate opened twenty yards off, and a man on horseback entered the field.

A firm-set, grave-faced man, dressed in a dark



tweed suit, with leathern gaiters and a low-crowned felt hat.

"Measter Geoffrey!" whispered Amandy, while Jabez wiped his brow with the back of his hand and looked sulky.

Up came the rider, sitting loosely in the saddle, and scarcely guiding the round, well-fed, thick-set horse that bore him. His firm-set head, seen more closely, showed just a touch of grey behind the ears; his brown eyes, though thoughtful, were deep-set and keen. He was only thirty years of age, but he would have passed for thirty-five, or even more, so grave and even stern was his expression.

"Wasting time as usual, Jabez Doyle!" he said as he passed, "and still philandering with Amanda. Get back to work!—the day's half done."

Jabez looked black as thunder, and made a mocking grimace behind the rider's back.

"Who's *he*, to go on as if he were measter?" he muttered. "Nice cock o' the walk, *him*!"

"Hold thy tongue, vule!" said Amanda, putting on her bonnet and striding out into the sun.

Right across the field rode Geoffrey Doone the overseer, and the groups in the distance rose and became active as they saw him coming. Part of the



JABEZ LOOKED BLACK AS THUNDER. . . . "WHO'S HE, TO GO ON AS IF  
HE WERE MEASTER?" HE MUTTERED.—Page 8.



field was yet to be mowed, though the grass of the greater part was already cut and drying in the midsummer heat. Presently the whole field was busy again, the mowers at work in the long grass, the others busy tossing the hay or piling it into cocks. Geoffrey reined in his horse in the centre of the field, and looked round.

It was high ground, and he could see the fields and meadows for miles and miles, the green hedges, the dark clumps of woodland, and, beyond, the sunny slopes of the high downs. Right above the field, a mile away, was the farm-house—an old straggling house, with many outbuildings, a garden, and an apple orchard. How still and peaceful all looked! How warm and glowing! He knew every landmark, every tree and stone, in the old farm: for had he not lived there, man and boy, for twenty years? had he not witnessed twenty haymakings and twenty harvests in that very place? His thoughts travelled back to the time when he came to the farm, a friendless boy, and was welcomed and sheltered by the old farmer, now long since dead. And now, when Miss Catherine ruled in her father's stead, *he* was her right-hand man and overseer. Scarcely ever had he taken holiday, or wandered away for

more than a day at a time, and then only to the county town on market or other business. He had grown, like a firm-rooted oak, in that soil, and had few wishes or dreams beyond it. His heart welled up in gratitude for favours past, for kindnesses received; for had he not had "schooling," and been treated by his first benefactor almost like a son?

As he passed close to the wain, making for another gate at that side of the field, he caught sight of two figures standing in the shadow—a woman and a man, neither of the species "clodhopper," like Jabez and Amanda.

The man was young, handsome, and somewhat delicate of feature, and his dress betokened some superior station in country life. The woman was about eight-and-twenty, tall, and firmly built, brown with the sun, dark-haired and dark-eyed, and though her gown was only of common cotton, and she wore the great white sun-hat of the place and period, her manner bespoke a certain authority.

"Geoffrey!" she cried, and he rode up to her, and saluted her companion with a nod.

"Yes, Miss Catherine."

"Please hurry up to the farm at once. The old

mare's foaling, and I've had to call in Dutton to look after her, for she's having a bad time."

Geoffrey nodded, and was turning away, when she called out to him—

"I'm coming after you directly. George has brought me bad news about the Gaffer, and I want your advice at once."

He nodded again, and rode quickly away. Neither of the two had noticed his dark flush of surprise at finding them there together, or the look of wistful discomfort with which he had looked into the bright eyes of his young mistress.

"What a good fellow he is!" said George, with an air of friendly patronage. "I wonder how you'd get on without him?"

"Why, I shouldn't get on at all," replied Catherine, smiling. "Always busy, ever stirring, never thinking of himself, but always of *us*. When father died, a year after mother was taken away, and I was left with little Bridget all alone, what should I have done without Geoffrey! The farm on my hands, debts and trouble all round; Bridget a helpless little mite of ten, and *me* eighteen, and as brown and ill-favoured as the Lord makes 'em"—

"Nay, nay, Catherine, not ill-favoured!"

"Well, then, stupid and common, with no book-learning, and no knowledge of how to manage beasts or men. What should I have done with the farm without a strong man to help me? But, there, I must go up now, and you'll come too, won't you, George?"

"Well, I was thinking of going home."

"You mustn't do that—come to the house, and till I'm done with Geoffrey you can talk to Bridget."

The young man, his face suddenly brightening, at once acquiesced. They walked side by side through the field, and onward through the meadows leading to the farm.

Though she had spoken of bad news, Catherine looked radiant. A tyro in love might have seen how the wind blew! Every look, every movement of the woman was full of the joy of life, and that joy was radiated to her from the handsome youth at her side. In his company she was filled with the large content of happy animals. Her step was firm upon the ground, and she walked with the easy grace of perfect health and strength. From time to time she glanced round at her companion, and on each occasion her face brightened. He, quite un-

conscious of his influence upon her, lounged on thoughtfully, his hands in the pockets of his dark tweed coat.

Catherine Thorpe libelled herself indeed, though laughingly, when she called herself "ill-favoured." She had all the freshness and comeliness of full-blown womanhood. Brown she was as a ripe brown pear, and without any of the graces of a fine lady; but her eyes were bright, her teeth white, her features finely formed, and her shape as straight and well-poised as any form wrought in marble. By her side, indeed, the young man, though hale and strong, looked almost a weakling.

"I can't tell you," he said, "how sorry I am about this business with my father."

"Never mind," she replied, smiling.

"But I do, Catherine. I'm downright sick and ashamed when I think what a churl he is to such old friends. But, there, you *know* what he is. Money, money, money, is all his dream! He grudges himself even the food he eats and the clothes he wears."

"That's the way to hoard up riches, I suppose?"

"Well, at any rate, I'm sick of it all, and that's why I came over to tell you"—

"To tell *me*! Yes?"



14 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"That he'll have to get some one else to do his dirty work. I'm going away."

"Going away !"

The smile faded from her face, and her heart began beating wildly.

"To London. They've offered me a place in a big grain warehouse yonder, and I thought—well, I thought *you* 'd like to know."

She was silent for some moments, and when she spoke her voice trembled.

"It's a shame, a crying shame," she said, "that the old man should drive you away like that ! And he so rich, with thousands in the bank."

"Let him keep it ! I can work. There's another thing, I'm sick of his eternal cry that I should marry some woman with money. Morning, noon, and night it's the same story—about this or that rich wench to be had for the asking. As if I'd sell myself like that !"

"I'm sure you wouldn't !" said Catherine, looking down. Her sun-hat hid her face, so that he did not see the crimson blush that covered her cheeks.

"I knew *you* 'd think me in the right," he said softly.

She nodded emphatic assent, still with her face turned away. Her look was radiant again. She felt

the warmth of earth and sky, and was once more full of the joy of life. He had come to *her*, he had confided in *her* first of all!

As they passed up the meadows, a wood-dove crooned in a neighbouring tree, and the deep, long-drawn note seemed to come out of her own full heart. The growing grass, the kindling air, was happy and alive; the earth seemed drawing great deep breaths of peace and joy. What did all else matter now? What mattered her own troubles, the old man's anger, the son's wrath, since everything in the world was so glad and bright? She had no thought of the future. She only knew that she was happy, and that it was full summer.

Hers was a nature with few caprices and no self-deceptions—incapable of analysis or introspection. Had the young man said to her at that moment, "I love you, Catherine," she would have felt no surprise and have expressed none, but would have replied simply, "And I love *you*, George," giving herself to him frankly and with a full heart. Her modesty was that of a beautiful animal, and in her love there was neither fear nor shame. "God made the woman for the man, and the man for the woman," was her good old country creed. And, being simple and sane of

disposition, she needed no present protestation of love to make her happy. Love to her, at that moment, seemed as simple and certain as the green earth, as the warm air, as the restful clouds, as her own gladly beating heart. She breathed it, she felt it in her veins, and it was enough. George had come to her, he was at her side, and all the rest seemed easy.

Wholly unsuspecting of the feelings he had awakened, and which had been growing in Catherine's heart for many a day, George walked on, with his eyes on the farm above him. All his thoughts were *there* ! —Catherine was his friend, his comrade, his sister even, but that was all. In his eyes she was a good kind creature, comely enough, but, so far as he was concerned, almost sexless.

A cock crowed, up among the farm buildings, and another answered the challenge.

"Sign of rain," said Catherine, smiling. What cared she for rain or storm then, though it should play havoc with the haymaking !

"Oh, it won't come yet," replied George, carelessly.

They stepped out upon the deep-furrowed road which led up to the farm-house, followed it for a hundred yards, and opened a small wicket-gate leading

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 17

into a wild piece of garden which faced the porch ; and on the rough lawn just outside the porch a pretty girl of twenty sat in a wicker chair, humming to herself and sewing.

"Here's Bridget !" cried Catherine, beaming with affection.

Bridget looked up, then, seeing George, blushed and nodded a greeting. The young man blushed too, and held out his hand, which the girl took quietly. Catherine, sure of her own happiness, looked on with a smile of large approval.

## CHAPTER II.

### UP AT THE FARM.

Thro' the haze of the heat, cattle low, lambkins bleat,  
While *tweet a tweet, tweet!* the birds whistle sweet,  
And Love's in the air, like a lark on the wing O!—*Old Song.*

CATHERINE and Bridget Thorpe were two sisters by the same mother, though in age there was nearly eight years' difference between them : Bridget being, as the old farmer used to express it, "an after-thought," born when the parents had given up all thoughts of having another child. Seen apart, they bore a certain resemblance to each other, though the younger sister was much fairer in complexion ; but standing side by side, they seemed of different parentage altogether. Bridget was small, and slight for her age, with wistful blue eyes, a pouting rosebud of a mouth, a nose slightly *retroussé*, and delicate feet and hands ; refined and lady-like in every look and gesture. Catherine, on the other hand, seemed of larger

mould than she really was, a woman of the people, neither delicate nor refined. The very dress of the sisters was a contrast. While Catherine wore much the same raiment as her own dairy woman, Bridget was attired like a lady in a dress of better cut and finer material, with dainty boots on her feet, and gloves on her hands, to keep them from the sun.

Softly and gently, with the look of a mother in her eyes, Catherine bent over her sister and kissed her, saying—

"I've brought George to amuse you. I've got to talk to Geoffrey."

Then, with a smile and a nod, she entered the porch and passed into the house.

The pertinacious wood-dove, who had been cooing in the trees below, had now ensconced himself in a large elm overhanging the garden, and was filling the air with his dreamy call. Bridget sewed on, listening, while George stood by, awkwardly looking at her. For a long time neither said a word. The young man was the first to break the silence, and with a somewhat irrelevant remark—

"I've often wondered, Bridget, that your sister doesn't marry ; but there, she doesn't seem one of the marrying sort."

20 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

Stitch ! stitch ! went the little fingers.

"Indeed no," the girl replied, smiling. "She has too much sense."

Here George at once saw an opening, which he endeavoured to enlarge.

"You think marrying's stupid then?" he observed somewhat sheepishly.

"Folks *say* so." Humming to herself.

"Well, it all depends!"

"On what?"

"On the folk concerned. Where there's *love*, you know"——

"What's *that*?"

"Why, you see love's—well, love's love!"

Bridget laughed outright.

"How do folk feel when they're in love?" she asked slyly.

"Well, a bit awkward—full of things that can't be said, and, well, frightened!"

"Indeed, are you ever frightened!"

"Sometimes."

"Who frightens you?"

"*You* do!"

"Am I so dreadful?"

"Not at all; but, you see, when I talk to Cathe-

rine I feel quite at home. She's so frank and true and good, like one's own sister."

"And I'm *not*. Thank you!"

"With *you* it's different!"

Bridget pouted her lips, and knitted her brow thoughtfully.

"That's because I'm not *pretty*. I was always an ugly little thing. When I was a baby I'd a mouth like a frog!"

Here George, seeing a chance for a compliment, observed eagerly—

"Your mouth's like a rosebud!"

"All prickles! Then it's my *nose* that's ugly?"  
[Here she rubbed it dubiously.] "I know it turns up!"

"Of course. You wouldn't have it turn down? Besides, it makes folk want to *kiss* you!"

"Then it's like their impudence! I detest kissing—it always looks so silly."

"Yet you kissed Catherine."

"Oh, that's different, as you would say—and, besides, Catherine is more to me than all the world!"

As she spoke, a look of infinite tenderness, wistful in its yearning as the look of a loving child, passed over the girl's face.



While George and Bridget were talking together in full sunshine, Geoffrey and Catherine were busily engaged in the great oak-raftered kitchen at the rear of the house : a capacious chamber, of barn-like proportions, with a deep old-fashioned ingle, at either side of which were seats of black oak, and a warm fire burning on the hearth, as if it were mid-winter instead of midsummer. The kitchen was full of queer divisions and corners, in one of which, close to the window, there was a piece of carpet, a work-table, and a writing-desk—the whole forming a sort of a little parlor, open to the rest of the room. Here Catherine, with the aid of Bridget, audited her accounts, paid her labourers, and attended generally to the farm business; and here she was busy with the overseer, showing him one paper after another to explain the financial situation.

"The worst of debts," she observed philosophically, as he scrutinized the documents, "is that they come, like the swallows, all at once. There's the rates nearly a month overdue, and the money owing to the Gaffer, and all the other odds and ends—so that I scarce know which way to turn."

"Marsh will wait," returned Geoffrey, thoughtfully ;  
"so must the Gaffer."

"I'm in doubts, Geoffrey. One's a hard man, t'other's a fool!"

Geoffrey was silent for a moment, then he said, without raising his eyes—

"If the worst comes to the worst, you must get some friend to help you."

"I've no friends, Geoffrey, now father's gone."

"You've *one*, Catherine," was the quiet reply. "The man your father took in and sheltered many a long year ago—the man who owes everything to you and yours. You know I've something put by, and it's more than enough to free you of all your troubles."

"Take *your* money!" cried Catherine.

"Who has a better right to it? You *shall* take it."

"I can't. I'd rather sell the lease and go away."

"You shall never do that—never!" said the overseer. "If you won't take the money, if you don't trust me enough to take it as a gift, at least have it as a loan—you'll soon repay me!"

"How good you are!" she said, looking into his eyes.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, colouring under the look.

"But yes!—I always think of you, ay, and pray for you, just as if you were my own dear brother."

Through the blue, diamond-shaped panes of the low window the sunlight streamed, a moted ray trembling and full of life, and with it came the low of kine, the crowing of cocks, all the sleepy murmur of the farmyard. The light fell full on Catherine's bust and throat, leaving her face in shadow. Geoffrey's face was in shadow too, but he turned it away as she spoke the last words, which (little as the speaker guessed it) cut into his heart like a knife. She noticed the look of pain, but didn't guess its cause.

"Well, well," she said, smiling, "we'll see what the Gaffer has to say!" and passed over the tile-paved floor, where the dim firelight gleamed, and seemed struggling feebly to join issue with the sunlight at the window. She was not the least bit troubled. Duns might come and duns might go, but her heart that day was full of sweet content.

"Well, Jasper, how are the lambs?"

"Sound and safe," answered a voice from the ingle.

"Of course you've heard. The mare's in labor, and I've had to call in Dutton to pull her through."

"He? He be no use. Them new-fangled vets don't know the ways o' beasts."

The speaker was a man of nearly seventy years of

age, though he looked even older ; tall of figure, but round-shouldered, as if through ever bending forward and leaning on a staff ; wrinkled and grey-haired, yet fresh-coloured, with keen grey eyes, puckered up in constant scrutiny of wind and weather. He wore an old smock-frock, gaiters, and heavy shoes. By his side lay a shepherd's crook, and at his feet slept a shaggy-coated sheepdog. He was eating bread and cheese, cutting off the mouthfuls slowly and deliberately with a clasp-knife.

"Well," said Catherine, laughing, "you were up on the weald, or I'd have asked you to try some of your herbs, and maybe a charm too, into the bargain."

Here Geoffrey, who had quietly followed his mistress, broke in with "I'd back Jasper against the doctor, whether the patient's man or beast."

The shepherd looked up with a grim smile.

"Thankee, Measter Geoffrey. I be no scholar, thank God ! but I know the yerbs and the flowers, and the signs o' the stars and planets, and the ways of living things. Lonesomeness breeds thoughts, Miss Catherine. There's more curious things in nature than foolish folk believe."

"And *you* know them, Jasper," said Catherine.

"Didn't you cure Dame Seafeld of her rheumatism when all the doctors failed? And when poor Bess Thistlewaite was pining away for the miller, didn't you teach her a charm to cure the heartache?"

Jasper's face expanded into a broad smile of self-satisfaction. He swallowed the last mouthful of bread and cheese, wiped his knife on his sleeve, and then said, nodding good-humouredly—

"Well, maybe I know the ways o' wimmen and the humours of flesh and blood."

"And you an old bachelor!" said Catherine, nudging Geoffrey with her elbow.

"Well, Miss, a bachelor sees nature from an on-prejudiced pint of view. He bean't tied down to apron-strings and childer, like some poor vules o' men."

So saying, he arose and stepped from his seat, while the dog rose too, and stretched itself. His great height became now apparent. Even with his stoop, he stood about six feet. Holding his old felt hat in his hand, leaning on his crook, and blinking his eyes cunningly, he looked at his mistress as she said gaily—

"Well, when I'm sick or in love, I'll come to you!"

"Do, Miss ; and I'll put my finger on the trouble, if I can't find a cure," he said, passing slowly towards the open door ; then pausing and looking back he added, "Maybe I could tell Measter Geoffrey summat, too, about his self !"

"Oh, I'm tough and sound !" said the overseer, with a nervous laugh.

"There's a weak spot somewheres in every man," answered Jasper, nodding his head philosophically, "be he ever so strong. . . I brought 'ee them yerbs, Miss Catherine. Gathered them at full moon, last night."

"Thank you, Jasper."

As the shepherd approached the door, he was confronted by a stout, red-faced man entering in his shirt-sleeves, followed by another man, very small and spare, who was carrying the stout man's coat.

"It's all right now, Miss Catherine," said the stout man, with a contemptuous look at the shepherd. "Mother and child, as the saying is, are doing well, and the foal's a picture to look at."

"Thank you, Mr. Dutton," cried Catherine.

The shepherd's face was puckered up into a smile of amused contempt, not unmingled with sly malignity.

"Science be a wonderful thing, Measter Dutton," he observed quietly. "'Tis amazing how Nature ever got along without you doctor chaps all the years afore ye was born."

And with a chuckle he passed out into the farm-yard, while Dutton looked after him with a snort of scorn.

"That old charlatan ought to be locked up," he said, putting on his coat with the little man's assistance. "They punish old women for fortune-telling; they ought to quod *him* for illegal practices."

"Oh, Jasper's all right," returned Catherine, smiling. "You'll have a glass of ale?"

Dutton nodded, and Catherine tripped off to fill some glasses at a great barrel among the shadows.

"Morning, Mr. Geoffrey!—morning!" said the little man, speaking for the first time. He was very fresh-coloured and dapper, and, though he was only about fifty years old, he spoke in a high falsetto.

"Morning, Mr. Marsh."

At this moment George and Bridget entered the kitchen. Both looked flushed and a little self-conscious, as if their conversation had not been altogether casual. It was curious to note how at the young

man's appearance Geoffrey's face darkened, not angrily but sadly.

Catherine brought the ale, and both Dutton and Marsh partook of it. The talk turned on farm matters, on weather and crops, and particularly on the new-born colt, but it had a troubled undercurrent, for Catherine was in Dutton's debt, and Marsh was her Majesty's collector of taxes. As the men drank their ale and talked together, the two sisters walked over to the table by the window, and there conversed in whispers—Bridget sitting down before a pile of accounts, and Catherine bending over her, with one arm placed softly round her shoulders.

Presently, however, Dutton the surgeon called to Catherine, and craved a little private talk with her. They walked to the open door, and stood there talking. It was clear that Dutton was pressing his claim for money, for Catherine looked somewhat vexed and troubled. At last, however, he nodded, took her hand, and with a "Good-day" to the others went out into the yard, where his horse was waiting for him under the care of a farm-lad.

As Catherine returned towards Bridget, Mr. Marsh stopped her with a nervous smile on his fresh face and gave vent to a semi-amorous chuckle.



"Bless the man!" cried Catherine, "what's the matter with him?"

"It's the heart, Miss Catherine," piped the tax-collector, "quarrelling with the occupation!"

"Marsh has a large heart—no doubt of that," said George, standing with his back to the fireplace, while Geoffrey had taken the shepherd's seat in the ingle.

"Thankee, Mr. George. They do say of me, 'Marsh is a gay man, though he do collect the Queen's rates and taxes, and the wonder is he's never married!' But, there, rates and taxes are my misfortune."

"And ours, too, Mr. Marsh," said Catherine.

"Rates and taxes cast a gloom over welcome, and gaiety and law they never agree. I should have been a family man long ago but for that, for they do say I'm fresh-coloured and have pleasing ways. A month overdue, miss, I believe?" he added tenderly.

Catherine glanced towards the window, but Bridget had disappeared.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait a little longer, Mr. Marsh!"

"I'd wait a year to oblige a lady," answered the little man, bowing politely, "but them above me force me to act contrariwise to my disposition. Ah!"

it's a terrible misfortune to a pleasing man, and one as loves a welcome, to"——

Here his discourse was interrupted by Bridget, who tapped him on the arm, and, leading him to the table, requested him to write out a receipt for the amount due; then, opening a little purse and counting out the money on the table, she smiled at Catherine, who looked stupefied.

"The taxes are *my* affair this time," cried Bridget, with an air of importance. "There's your money!"

"Bridget!" said Catherine; "you mustn't! I won't have it!"

"Nonsense!" cried Bridget. "Now, Mr. Marsh, I hope you're satisfied. Please, no apologies!"

The little man sighed, signed the receipt, and took the money, then, with a nervous "Morning, morning!" and a low bow to the ladies, took his departure. This time Catherine looked really troubled. Throwing herself into a chair, she renewed her protest.

"It's a shame! All your little savings! It was for you to dress nicely, to make yourself look nice. Geoffrey!"

Geoffrey rose at the call and came over to the window.

"Do you know what she's done?" cried Catherine.  
"Isn't it too bad of her?"

Geoffrey smiled, and said nothing; but Bridget, with a sound between a laugh and a cry, threw her arms around her sister's neck.

"Never mind, dear!—by-and-bye—some day—when I marry, you know—you shall pay me back!"

The cloud passed from Catherine's face, and she laughed merrily.

"What *are* you laughing at?" demanded Bridget.

"To hear you talk of marrying! A mite like you! Time enough for that, Geoffrey, when she's grown a woman, eh?"

"But I am a woman!"

"You're a baby!" cried Catherine, drawing her face down and kissing it. "What between you and Geoffrey, I feel quite ashamed. Why, only just now the stupid fellow wanted me to rob *him*, and now you've made me rob *you*!" she added, clasping Bridget, and reaching out her other hand to Geoffrey, who took it quietly. "But bless you both for it! It's good to be loved like that! To have such a sister—and such a brother!"

For the moment, all three, even Catherine, had forgotten George's presence. He stood in the fire-light, listening and looking on.

## CHAPTER III.

### INTRODUCES THE GAFFER.

Gnomes that pile the golden heaps,  
Busy when the whole world sleeps,  
Pile them high around the bed  
While he lies, half quick, half dead !  
Let him see, when he doth rise,  
Golden heaps 'neath golden skies—  
Till his soul and sense and thought  
Are to that complexion wrought.— *The Gold Fays.*

CATHERINE THORPE had not exaggerated her troubles. She had for some time past had the greatest possible difficulty in making both ends meet, and this in spite of the zealous care and good advice of her right-hand man and overseer.

Besides the eight hundred acres of the farm proper, she leased some hundred acres of pasturage on the Weald, several miles away, and the whole formed a large extent of land for a woman to look after and farm to advantage. Seed crops were no longer profitable, owing to the influx of foreign grain, and

nearly all the acreage was devoted to meadowlands and grass. Of late years, however, even the raising of stock had been less profitable, and Catherine, mainly for lack of capital, found herself crippled even in that direction. Still, the land was such good land, and so close to the best markets, that a little more capital would have made Catherine, with Geoffrey's aid, a well-to-do woman.

Her sex, as may be readily guessed, was much against her. The farmers in the neighbourhood shrugged their shoulders at the idea of a feminine rival, and the people at the Bank, full of good old conservative prejudice, were far less accommodating to her than they would have been to a male creature of half her shrewdness and talent. But, indeed, if the truth must be told, Catherine's notions of farming were entirely rudimentary. It was Geoffrey the overseer who really managed matters, but, unfortunately, he had to submit himself to indiscreet interferences on the part of his mistress. With a quite free hand he might have made the farm profitable, for he was clever and far-seeing.

There was but one opinion among those who conceived themselves best fitted to form a judgment: that Catherine's position was anomalous and against

that law of nature which points to male supremacy, that her only chance of salvation was to marry, and that (in default of a wealthier suitor of the breed "farmer") she might do worse than marry Geoffrey Doone. Yet, curiously enough, Catherine herself never guessed that gossip was connecting her with Geoffrey in *that* way. From childhood upwards she had looked upon him as a sort of elder brother, left in her father's place to look after her. Not unfrequently she would say to him, "When you marry, Geoffrey—and of course you will when Miss Right comes along—what will become of us all here at the farm?" And the poor fellow, whose heart was empty with long yearning, would answer, smiling, "I shall never marry; I'm far better off as I am."

Diffident of his own powers of attraction, reminded again and again that Catherine had never looked upon him in the light of a possible lover, Geoffrey continued to wear the mask and hold his peace. But when the state of affairs began to grow threatening, and he realized how necessary it was for him, if the farm was to thrive, to possess full authority, he began to hope a little, and perhaps he would have spoken, had he not suddenly become aware of the fact that Catherine had fixed her affections upon

another man—young George Kingsley, only son of Gaffer Kingsley of The Warren.

Geoffrey alone, guided by the insight of love, realized the situation, and saw that Catherine, usually so calm and self-contained, so incapable of mere fancies and flirtations, was spellbound by George's handsome face. Although he perceived, at the same time, that George was utterly indifferent to Catherine, and completely fascinated by Bridget, the fact did not lessen his personal despair of ever winning his mistress's affections.

Sick and weary at heart, he left George Kingsley with the two women, and mounting his horse in the farmyard, followed a rough country road which led to the neighbouring village. His torture that day had reached its culmination. The young man's sunny presence, Catherine's secret looks of happy admiration, her simple confidence and happiness, Bridget's complete unsuspecting, had all tormented him beyond endurance. Once in the open air, he breathed more freely, but his face was still heavily clouded as he walked his horse slowly downhill between the high honeysuckled hedges, and so deep was his abstraction that he scarcely noticed the approach of an old man who, at the first glance, might have been taken

for some itinerant beggar. Coming close, however, he recognized old Kingsley, usually known in impolite circles as "the Gaffer."

A little wizened old man, fox-like of complexion and expression, with small cunning eyes, shaggy eyebrows, a savage ill-tempered mouth, and a low projecting forehead. He wore an ancient coat of moleskin much stained and bedraggled, moleskin knee-breeches, coarse stockings, and blucher boots laced with pieces of string. Bareheaded, he held in his hand an old wideawake, with which he fanned himself as, puffing and blowing, and leaning on a thick staff, he climbed the hill.

"Good day, Gaffer," said Geoffrey, drawing rein. "Going up to the farm?"

"Where else should I be goin'?" snarled the old man. "This road don't lead other ways as I knows on. Say, *you*!—is my son Jarge up yonder?"

"Yes, you'll find him there."

"And the women too, I s'pose? Which o' them penniless wenches is the vule coorting, eh?"

"You'd better ask him yourself," answered Geoffrey, frowning and shrugging his shoulders. "I didn't know that he was courting anybody, and when



38 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

you talk of Miss Catherine or Miss Bridget, I'll ask you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

The Gaffer grinned maliciously, and, resting both hands on his staff, gazed up into the eyes of the overseer.

"Cock o' the walk, *you!* But maybe some day you'll come to your senses. Will ye tell me another thing: Who's goin' to pay me my money? Fort-night's grace 's run out all but twenty-four hours, and if I don't get the brass on my mortgage, I'll foreclose and sell. See?"

"You won't do that!" cried Geoffrey, quickly.

"Won't I? Then you wait and find out! Shall I tell 'ee a secret? This farm 's goin' into the market, and I 'm goin' to ha' it. Farm joins farm. Wi' this place and The Warren, 't will make fifteen hundred acres, seed and growin' land."

As the old man spoke, with all the relish of one who anticipates a feast, his little ferret's eyes gleaming, his low brow wrinkling over his puckered cheeks, he seemed such an incarnation of avarice and malignity that Geoffrey's fingers itched to strangle him out of life. But suddenly the Gaffer's face changed to another expression. The features softened, the malicious grin returned.

"Say, *you!*" he cried. "There's one way out o' it, maybe. If Catherine can't pay, she can take a partner; land joins land. The wench needs a master, and she might do worse than wed."

"Wed!" echoed Geoffrey, as the truth dawned slowly upon him. "Why, you don't mean"—

"I mean I 'll ha' her, if she's willing!" said the Gaffer, with a wink and a nod.

Geoffrey looked aghast, and longed more than ever to exterminate him. The very thought of Catherine uniting herself to the old monster seemed like blasphemy. The old man saw what was passing in his mind, and proceeded with an air of diabolical enjoyment—

"Maybe you'd like to wed the wench yourself, and be cock o' the walk still, eh? But you're nobody, and I'm somebody, see? I'm hale and strong, tho' I ha' berried three wives already, and 'twould be a good match—a good match."

Whether he spoke in earnest or merely with a view of enjoying Geoffrey's irritation, the Gaffer seemed hugely in love with his own suggestion of a way to solve all difficulties, but the expression of his face changed to one of terror when the overseer, lowering down upon him, and pressing his horse close as if

to smite him down, said in a voice low and deep with passion—

"You old rat! Say another word like that, or speak of it to Miss Catherine, and you'll have to reckon with *me*. *You, you*, with both feet in the grave, half dead and rotten already!"

"Well, no offence!" cried the Gaffer, looking livid.

With an angry exclamation Geoffrey reined back his horse suddenly and rode away. The Gaffer tottered, the staff fell from his hands, and he almost followed it to the ground; then, gathering himself together, and muttering feeble imprecations, he stopped, picked up his staff, and hobbled up the hill.

The afternoon sun was shining golden over fields and meadows, the haze of heat was thickening, and even in the shadows of the lanes dwelt all the warmth of summer. With a heart full of bitterness and anger, Geoffrey Doone walked on indifferent to all outward sights and sounds, until, turning an angle of the lane, he reached a small two-storeyed cottage, shadowed by a gnarled old walnut-tree, and swathed to the pendent eaves in creeping plants, their mass of summer greenery deeply touched here and there with the gold, purple, and scarlet of

autumn. It stood back from the road, and the garden in front of it, bisected by a short gravelled walk, lined on either side with a row of oyster-shells, leading to the low-browed door, was bare but for a patchy growth of odorous shrub. No smoke came from the chimney, and the place looked chill and deserted in the bright vivid sunshine of the declining day.

Geoffrey dismounted, hitched his horse's reins over the post of the rustic gate, and then stood, fumbling absently in his pocket for the key, and looking dolefully at the house. Then, with a scarcely perceptible shrug, he passed up the walk, unlocked the door, and walked into the front room. The ceiling, which had once been white, was nearly as dark as the brown-painted walls, and the small, heavily latticed window, further darkened by curtains of some sombre material, admitted but little light. A heavy oaken mantelpiece projected nearly half across the room, and a small modern firegrate, built in the recess of the generous old-fashioned hearth, was flanked on either hand by a solidly built settle. The fire was laid, and a kettle stood over the coals, to which Geoffrey, in the same absent fashion, applied a match. He stood with his hat tilted on to the ex-

treme back of his head, and his hands plunged to the depths of his pockets, watching the broadening flame, and shaping his lips to a soundless whistle, which ended with a sigh and a shrug.

Over the old-fashioned dresser, garnished with a few willow-pattern plates and teacups, was a rude shelf, supporting a dozen well-used volumes: "The Complete Farrier," a portly Bible and Book of Common Prayer, once gorgeous with much gilding, which had faded under the dust of years; Milton's poems, an odd volume of the "Spectator" and a small library of bucolic lore. The lonely bachelor, sick of his hopeless thoughts, turned to the shelf and took down a volume at hazard, stowed himself in a chintz-covered armchair by the window, and began to read. But the words carried no meaning to his troubled mind, and before his eyes had travelled over half a page he let the volume fall to his knees, and sat gazing through the window with a face whose expression gradually changed from one of pure boredom and worry to intent and earnest thought.

He rose and paced to and fro in the kitchen, rubbing a wrinkled forehead with a heavy hand.

"Have I the right to do it?" he murmured. "How would she take it? She's proud as Lucifer. Pooh!

If I did it, she'd *have* to take it, and as to what she thought of me—well, I couldn't be farther off from hope than I am. I'll do it!"

He drove a clenched fist hard into the open palm of his other hand, and walked out of the cottage, unheeding the cheerful hum of the kettle, now singing merrily on the crackling fire. With the aspect of a man firmly fixed upon some desperate course of action, he drew out his watch.

"I've got five-and-twenty minutes. The mare can do it in that time." He sprang to the saddle, and started the mare with a smart pat on the haunch. "Get along, old lady!" He looked, as he clattered along the deserted road, as if he were charging an invisible enemy, his lips set, his brows knitted above his keen, determined grey eyes.

At a bend of the road he came in sight of a natty little dogcart being driven at a sharp pace towards him by an old gentleman of rather formal aspect. He sat very stiff in his seat, with his whip held straight up like a sceptre. His face was clean-shaven but for two small grey whiskers of the mutton-chop formation, accurately trimmed, and behind a pair of clearly glittering gold spectacles shone a pair of keen grey eyes, rather deeply set in their orbits. Geoffrey

would have continued his way with a more rapid salute in passing ; but the old gentleman pulled up at sight of him, and the young overseer slackened his speed, and brought his horse to a stand beside the dogcart.

"Fine evening," said the old gentleman.

"Very," said Geoffrey. "But I suppose you didn't stop a busy man to tell me that?"

The elder man coughed behind his hand, covered with a shining black glove.

"Well, no," he said, and hesitated for a moment. "You knew old Adams the farmer, I suppose? Died the other day, you know—when was it—Thursday?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "I knew him. What about him?"

"I was his legal adviser," said the old man, glancing at a blue bag which lay on the seat of the dogcart beside him. "In fact I drew up his will for him."

"Yes?" said Geoffrey. "He hasn't left *me* much, I suppose?"

"No," said the lawyer, and, rather irrelevantly as it seemed to Geoffrey, inquired, "How are things going at the farm?"

"Pretty much as usual," answered Geoffrey, in a tone as nearly commonplace as he could make it.

"Pretty much as usual, eh?" repeated the lawyer.

"Ah! Miss Catherine well?"

"Very well, thank you."

The lawyer rubbed his chin and glanced askance at his companion.

"Queer old chap, old Adams! Very close. Cut up for an amount which surprised me. I thought I knew his figure pretty well, but I was much below it—much below it."

"And neither chick nor child to leave it to," said Geoffrey, as he thought, with a sigh, how little of the old farmer's wealth would have brought gladness to the aching heart of the woman he loved. "How has he left it?"

"Ah! my dear sir! You really mustn't ask. Professional men are bound to be secret about their clients' business."

"Founded a hospital or an almshouse for old bachelors, I suppose—the grumpy old curmudgeon!" said the young man.

"You'll know in good time," said the lawyer; "and when you do, you'll be surprised—or my name isn't Hillford. And so affairs at the farm are really just as usual, eh? That mortgage affair—the old Gaffer? Terrible old screw! And no friend to my



profession—does nearly all his law business for himself, and not so badly for an amateur. It will be a happy day for Miss Catherine when she is out of his clutches."

"I'm in a hurry, if you'll excuse me," said Geoffrey, curtly. "Good-night!"

"Good-night to you," responded the lawyer, and drove on, happily unconscious of the low-breathed anathemas the young man fulminated against him as his watch told him he had wasted five minutes of his precious time.

Geoffrey urged his horse to a brisker speed, and presently clattered on to the cobble-paved main street of the little market town. A three-storey building, the ground floor windows of which were plate glass, surmounted by the inscription, in green letters, "County Bank Branch, Limited," stood a little back from the irregular line of houses on his right. He reined in before it.

"As I thought!" he cried, in a tone of deep vexation. "I should have been in time if that old fool had not stopped me!"

He sat biting his nails angrily for a second or two, and then, dismounting, threw the rein to a boy loung-

ing near, and knocked at a green-painted door in the side of the building.

"Ask Mr. Purdon if he could be kind enough to give me a moment of his time," he said to the maid, and being ushered into a parlour on the first floor, stood looking out upon the street till awakened from his reverie by the entrance of the banker.

"It's quite irregular, I know," he said, after exchanging greetings, "to come on business after business hours, but I want to draw a little money from my account. It's extremely important."

"Well," said the banker, "it *is* a little irregular, but, still, if it is really important, I might manage it. What's the amount?"

Geoffrey named the sum he required, and Mr. Purdon left the room, returning presently with a roll of notes.

"You had better give me a receipt if you haven't your cheque-book," he said, as he handed them over to the young man.

Geoffrey wrote the required document, shook hands with the banker with reiterated thanks for his courtesy, and descending to the street, threw a threepenny bit to the boy who held his horse, and clattered away homewards.

48 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

"H'm!" said the banker, as he watched his diminishing figure from the window. "Has it come to that? Gaffer Kingsley's mortgage is due to-morrow, and that amount would just cover the interest."

## CHAPTER IV.

### FATHER AND SON.

“Doth the rose spring fro’ the bramble,  
Or the lily fro’ the furze?  
Are maiden thoughts bred out o’ briars,  
Or pimpernels o’ burrs?  
Yet the hard heart breeds the gentle,”  
Quoth the Shepherd o’ the Fen,  
“And the queerest ways o’ Nature  
Are the ways o’ foolish men.”—*Old Ballad.*

STEALTHILY approaching the farmhouse by the back way, in the silent manner of feline animals, the Gaffer was arrested by the sight of a Treasure, at which his eyes sparkled questioningly. He bent over it, poked it with his staff, turned it over and over, and finally lifted it up for closer investigation.

It was an old mud-stained widewake hat, thrown carelessly away at the side of a heap of manure. Bad and battered as it was, it was in quite as good condition, and had originally been of far better quality, than the one he himself wore. A less careful man would have passed it scornfully by, but Gaffer Kingsley, who never overlooked anything, however

50 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

trifling, that might be of any value, not only lifted up the hat, but, after a careful examination, determined to appropriate it to his own use.

He had just come to this determination when he heard a low chuckle at his back, and, turning sharply, he encountered the penetrating eyes of Jasper the shepherd.

"Hullo, Shepherd, I didn't see ye!"

"No?" returned Jasper, drily. "You don't see much, Measter Kingsley, 'cept your own money-bags. What ha' you got there? Looks like something o' *mine*!"

"Yourn?" said the Gaffer, "I found it here on the dunghheap, cast away. Waste not, want not, say I. If it's yourn I'll gie ye thruppence for it. Come, thruppence! A new hat costs three or four shilling, and this is good enough to mend."

"Keep it, then!—and keep your thruppence!—I don't want it."

The Gaffer, being cantankerous by disposition, could not, without contradiction, even take advantage of so handsome an offer. He retained the hat, but, moving towards the farm door looked round and snarled: "He's a vule that gies summat for nowt. You'll die in the workhouse, Shepherd."

So saying, he made his way to the open door, and without any ceremony entered the kitchen. There he found his son, sitting alone by the fire.

"Hullo!" cried the Gaffer.

"Hullo!" returned George, glancing up, rather sulkily.

Son and father looked at each other, the one standing and leaning on his staff, the other not rising from his seat; the young man the very incarnation of youthful strength and comeliness, the old man the very spirit of moral ugliness and physical decay. It was difficult to realise that they were so close related.

"Well?" said the Gaffer, showing his toothless gums.

"Well!" said George, defiantly.

"What brings ye hereaways? Ye needn't speak—I know. You're running after one o' them two sisters!"

George made no reply.

"Can't you speak? Can't ye look me in the face, *you*? What ha' you got to say?"

"Nothing," said George, rising; "only that from this day forward we two part. I'm going to London," and he walked towards the door.

"Go, and be d——d!" cried the Gaffer, but added,

52 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

with a shriek like that of an angry raven, "Stop! or I'll fling my staff at your head!"

A threat which would certainly have been fulfilled had not George, looking pale and determined, turned and faced his father, demanding, "What more have you got to say to me?"

"Which o' them two beggars are ye running after?"

"That's my business!"

"No, it's mine. Haven't I warned ye? Haven't I told ye that unless ye wed money ye touch no money o' mine!"

"I don't want it!" exclaimed George, flushing angrily.

"No? Bah, ye're a vule, I tell ye! There's nowt in the world worth having *but* money—or money's worth. Be wise, *you*! Some day or other, when I'm dead—say fifty or sixty years hence—ye may own it all. Think o' that! But ye mun bring as well as take, if ye want my blessing. Land and money, money and land, to add up wi' the rest—and ye may throw in the wife, so long as she brings the dower!"

Breathed by this flight of oratory, the Gaffer fell into an armchair standing near the centre of the room. After a moment, he looked up and demanded—

"Where's the women?"

"Somewhere about the stables, looking at a young colt."

"Couple o' vules! Much they know o' beasts and varming. D'ye know what's brought me herea-ways?"

"I can guess."

"Oh! ye're clever enough for that, are ye? Well, I ha' come for my money, and ye know what that means. If Catherine Thorpe can't pay, I foreclose, and out she'll go, unless"——

Here he hesitated, and smiling at his own thought, looked around him approvingly. Everything he saw was warm, serene, and pleasant. An air of cleanly comfort pervaded everything, from the great black rafters to the seats by the fire, polished by the friction of many sitters.

Sick and disgusted, George was about to depart, when Catherine and Bridget entered the kitchen, the former crying, "Such a little beauty, isn't she, Bridget?" All at once they became aware of the Gaffer, seated ominously in the centre of the floor, his small eyes twinkling, his face twisted into a malicious smile. Their happy faces became clouded, and they looked at each other.

"Morning," said the Gaffer, sharply.



"Good-morning," answered Catherine, crossing to the fireplace, while Bridget retired nervously to her seat near the window. There was a pause, broken only by the wheezy breathing of the old man, who was hugely enjoying the consternation of the women at his appearance.

"Vine growing weather," he remarked, after a pause.

No one answered, but Catherine looked at George, who hung his head as if ashamed. There was another long pause, broken at last by Catherine, who felt the silence far too irksome for long endurance.

"I was going to send over to you," she said, "and to ask you—well, to ask you to give me a little grace. Times are bad, and I don't know where to look for money."

The Gaffer smiled.

"Ye don't know where to look for money? Well, it won't come by looking for—leastways, by opening your mouth and gaping at the skies."

"At any rate, you can afford to wait, and George says"—

"Jarge is a vule!" cried the old man. "Never heed *him*: listen to me! 'Tis a crying sin and shame to see a lone woman ruling where a man should rule.





"EH, YOUNG MISSIE, WHAT AILS YE?"—Page 55.

Women folk don't know nowt 'cept house and dairy work, and the best thing as can happen to *you* is to ha' done with varming. See ?"

As she was silent, he continued—

"And when ye say I can afford to wait, ye talk like another vule. I'm a poor man, and what little I have 's been hard earned by the sweat o' my brow. My son there's a lazybones, but I'm a hard-working man. So when I say I want the money I mean I've got to ha' it. See? And now I ha' made all straight and pleasant, maybe you'll gi'e me a glass o' ale !"

Catherine offered him the desired refreshment with her own hand. He rewarded her with a nod, and, sipping the liquor slowly, observed with characteristic good taste—

"Don't think much o' your home-brewing—it tastes o' the must."

Here Bridget, who had taken up her sewing and was looking on impatiently, arrested his attention by an angry movement.

"Eh, young missie, what ails ye? Happen ye think I know nowt and see nowt, but I can see as far into things as most men, and I knows the ways o' women, for I ha' berried three wives. They're un-

common narvous flighty things is women, and a sore trouble to sensible men."

Though the observation was a general one, there was something so coarse, aggressive, and contemptuous in the manner of the speaker that Bridget flushed crimson and was about to retort angrily, when Catherine interposed and said—

"Never mind the Gaffer, Bridget! The words tumble out of his mouth like wasps out of a nest, and sting anyone that's handy. He doesn't mean half he says, and t'other half's only bad temper and hard living. If he wasn't his son's father I'd ask him to step out of my house, for fear he'd sour the ale and turn the milk."

For this sally, George rewarded her with an approving nod, but the old man, gripping his staff and striking it savagely on the ground, answered with a scowl—

"Don't 'ee crass *me*, Catherine Thorpe, for them as won't bend I break. See? You're only a vulish woman, when all 's said and done, but I'll talk sense to ye by-and-by."

Catherine laughed and shrugged her shoulders. At that moment the figure of the old Shepherd darkened the doorway.

"Lawyer Hillford's round at the front door, Miss Catherine, askin' to see ye. He's rode over from the town on purpose."

Catherine turned pale, for the mere mention of the lawyer's name at that period of difficulty suggested troubles and complications. Bridget, too, looked anxious ; while the Gaffer, foreseeing trouble, leant back in his chair and grinned maliciously.

"Whatever can he want with you?" said Bridget, going to Catherine.

"I'm sure I can't tell," was the reply. "I suppose it's about money."

"O' course," chuckled the Gaffer. "When the ravens come 'tis a bad look-out for the lambs. Best go and see him, Miss Catherine."

But hereupon the Shepherd, with a contemptuous look at the Gaffer, interposed quietly—

"Don't trouble, Miss Catherine. I think, maybe, it's good news."

"Good news?"

"'Tis whispered hereaways that old Adams has left ye summat in his will. You was kind to the old man, and when he was sick he often talked about 'ee."

"Heigho!" said Catherine. "More likely it's about the balance I owed Dutton for last year's

58 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

fodder. It never rains but it pours. Any amount of living creditors, and here's a dead one."

So saying, she left the kitchen, and ran to open the front door to the lawyer.

## CHAPTER V.

### A TURN OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

How pleasant it is to have money, heigho !  
How pleasant it is to have money !—*Old Song.*

CATHERINE was away for a long time. The blue fly hummed in the kitchen window-pane, the drowsy murmur of the farm came from without, while the Gaffer, still gripping his staff, dozed in his chair. George remained in the shadow, glancing at Bridget, who sat sewing in her place at the window. No one spoke a word.

Social intercourse in country districts is composed of large intervals of silence. The deep dreamy peace of nature slips into the dispositions of men, and makes them taciturn even when they are fairly happy. Life runs slowly, and thoughts are calm. It was quite pleasure enough for Bridget to sit and sew, first glancing occasionally towards her lover, and for George to watch her with gentle eyes. Even the Gaffer's presence had ceased to be irksome.

Presently the Shepherd rose, and, glancing toward



the inner passage, whence came the low murmur of voices in conversation, moved towards the door. The Gaffer, like a weasel asleep, opened his eyes and watched the tall figure go out into the sunshine; then, suddenly becoming aware of his son's presence, he growled—

"Best go home, *you*. I'll be coming by-and-by."

The young man made no answer, but Bridget looked at him with a smile.

"Catherine and Mr. Hillford are having a long talk," she said. "I hope it's nothing unpleasant."

"I hope not," returned George.

At that moment the Gaffer pricked up his ears, for there was the sound of a door opening and of voices talking in the passage; then the front door closed and the voices ceased. But Catherine did not appear. The three, listening attentively, heard her ascending the stairs to the upper part of the house and then moving to and fro in the bedchamber above.

Bridget put down her sewing, and rose, with a nervous look at George.

"I'm sure something has happened," she said.

"I will go and see!"

George nodded approval, but the Gaffer, suddenly shaking off his torpor, exclaimed sharply—

"Tell her, will 'ee, that I'm waiting for my money, and that I sha'n't stir till my money comes."

As Bridget hesitated, with an indignant glance at her tormentor, the sounds above ceased, the footsteps were heard again descending, and immediately afterwards Catherine entered the kitchen.

Her face was pale, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying ; but, despite these signs of excitement, she was smiling. Without once looking at either George or the Gaffer, she crossed the kitchen to Bridget, bent over her, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Oh, Catherine !" Bridget cried, returning the kiss. "Something has happened ?"

"Nothing," replied Catherine, with a faint hysterical laugh. "Only Mr. Hillford's so fond of talking, I thought he would never go."

"What did he come for ? Was Jasper right ? or was it only"——

"I'll tell you all about it presently," said Catherine, with another kiss ; then turning, with her old manner, to the Gaffer, she added : "Not gone yet ? Perhaps you're curious to know what the lawyer had to tell me ? Perhaps you wouldn't mind much if it was bad news he'd brought me ?"

"That's none o' my business," growled the Gaffer. "Every hen must sit on her own nest. I'm waiting for my money, that's all!"

Catherine laughed outright, and then, for the first time since her return, looked at George, who became the very picture of humiliation. As she looked at him her face seemed to grow actually luminous for a moment—flooded with light, like the new moon. No one observed that momentary change, and no one present observing it would have understood its significance, as the expression of a heart full of love to overflowing.

It came as it went, and Catherine was herself again. Standing face to face with the Gaffer, with her arms akimbo, she laughed anew.

"Cease thy clatter!" cried the Gaffer, striking on the tiled floor with his staff. "Can ye pay me my money or not, *you*?"

"Suppose I can't?" returned Catherine; "what then?"

"Why, then, 'tis a bad lookout for thee and thine," said the old man, setting his lips tight together and rising to his feet. Curiously enough, Catherine only smiled and shrugged her shoulders; then, whispering to Bridget, led her quietly from the kitchen,

pausing at the inner door to cast another look at George. Furious at this quiet defiance, the Gaffer shuffled towards the threshold, muttering to himself. George followed him, sick and sad at the turn the affair had taken, and the two came out into the full sunshine of the farmyard.

Here George paused, and looked sullenly at his father.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "I suppose you'll give them time?"

The Gaffer's only answer was a malicious grin.

Father and son parted down among the green lanes, the latter, finding all remonstrance useless, having refused to accompany his father home. The afternoon shadows were lengthening when the Gaffer, breathing hard after his long walk, reached the Warren Farm—a grim, dreary, tumble-down group of buildings, for the most part uninhabitable, immediately surrounded by acres of coarse land. The place was like its owner, sadly out of repair. Portions of the granaries had been destroyed by fire, other portions were blackened and seared by the same devouring element. The habitable part of the place consisted of a two-storeyed house or cottage, roofed with thatch, some stables, some barns and

sheds, and a few labourers' out-houses. The farm-yard was strewn with loose stones, and overgrown with long grass and thistles. There was little indication anywhere of even moderate prosperity.

But the farm, like its owner, was deceptive. Beyond the coarse acres of The Warren, burrowed over and under by the cony and the mole, were green stretches of meadow and great fields heavy with golden grain, all of which belonged to the Gaffer. Lines of pollards showed where the streamlets ran, watering the fruitful soil. Sleek-coated cattle sunned themselves on the green low-lying pastures, and on the higher slopes men and women were piling and carting the hay.

Entering the house, the Gaffer found himself at once in a large living-room or parlour. The chairs and table were of common deal, but in one corner was a great cabinet of black oak, and close to it, facing the fireplace, a large arm-chair. The low windows were curtained with chintz, black and decayed from long use, and diffusing the musty odour of age. An eight-day clock, several coarse engravings in wooden frames, an old and rusty "Joe Manton" fowling piece suspended over the mantelpiece, a few china ornaments, completed the furniture of

the apartment. There was no carpet on the floor, but a sheepskin rug was thrown down before the fireplace.

Still muttering to himself, the old man hobbled to the cabinet, unlocked it with a key which he took from his waistcoat pocket, and took out a packet of parchment deeds; then, drawing the deal table close to his arm-chair, sat down, and adjusting on his nose a pair of horn spectacles, began to examine the documents at leisure. As he did so, his characteristically malevolent expression deepened in intensity. Singularly enough, however, he could not understand a line; for though he could just manage to spell through a printed paragraph, he lacked the education to interpret handwriting.

This fact did not interfere in the least with his enjoyment. He knew the documents perfectly, particularly the one setting forth his mortgage on the estate of Catherine Thorpe. The very words of the covenant were so engraven on his mind that the farce of perusal was far from being as absurd as it might seem.

He was thus engaged, and presenting to the un instructed observer quite an erudite appearance, when a shadow appeared upon the threshold, and, looking

up, he met the quiet eyes of Geoffrey the overseer.

"Busy, Gaffer?" said Geoffrey, with a nod. "I hope I'm not disturbing your studies?"

"What brings 'ee hereaways?" snarled the Gaffer.

"I've come from Miss Catherine, and I've brought you that money—so make out a receipt at once, and we'll put an end to the matter."

"*What!*" cried the old man, amazed. His amazement grew as Geoffrey produced the notes fresh from the bank, and placed them on the table before him. Seizing them between his trembling fingers, and glancing from them to the bringer, and from the bringer back to them, the Gaffer counted them slowly. A delicious thrill caught from the crisp and rustling paper ran through his veins.

"Well, are they all right?" asked Geoffrey, good-humouredly.

Without replying, the Gaffer leant back in his chair, as if stupefied. There was a long pause.

"Say, *you*," queried the Gaffer at last, "where did Catherine get the money?"

"That's her business, not yours. Your business is to write me out a full discharge."

"I'll see lawyer, and send it along," was the reply. "Reckon she can trust me?"







THE DOOR OPENED AND, TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF BOTH, CATHERINE HERSELF  
APPEARED. — Page 67.

Since the notes were numbered, and, with all his faults, Gaffer Kingsley was straight enough in affairs of money, Geoffrey was quite satisfied, and had turned to go with a short "Good-day," when he was called back.

"If it be a convenience to Catherine," said the old man, slyly, "happen I might wait a bit."

"No need of that," answered Geoffrey, "she's able to settle up without seeking favours of you or any man."

The Gaffer laughed, and leaning forward suddenly, with his eyes fixed on the overseer's face, said—

"Wager it's not her money, but yourn! Cock o' the walk, *you*, and you come here to pay her debts, eh?"

Geoffrey went red as crimson, but before he could reply the other continued—

"New notes, master, fresh from the bank, and I saw you riding thereaway this morning. Happen there's no law to make me take the money from *you*? But I'll take it, friendly like, to save trouble. See?"

An angry answer was on the tip of Geoffrey's tongue, when the door opened, and, to the astonishment of both, Catherine herself appeared, accompanied by George Kingsley. She still wore her sun-

hat and cotton gown, as if fresh from the hayfields, and looked bright and merry. On seeing Geoffrey she paused and cried—

"Heyday, Geoffrey! What are *you* doing here at The Warren?"

Then, her eye falling on the notes lying on the table before the Gaffer, she continued—

"Bank notes, too! Is the Gaffer belying his character and making you a harvest present?"

The overseer hung his head and seemed tongue-tied, but he was saved any effort at explanation by the old man, who exclaimed—

"'Tis the mortgage money, Missie. Master Geoffrey brought it over, and happen you sent him! I was just sayin' that if so be 'twould help 'ee I might wait a bit; but Geoffrey (cock o' the walk, *him*!) was sayin' as you'd take favours from no man—not even an old friend like *me*!"

Thoroughly amazed, Catherine looked at Geoffrey, as if demanding an explanation; then, as their eyes met, all the truth dawned upon her, and she realised the extent of the sacrifice the man was making. Touched to the heart, she reached out her hand impulsively, while Geoffrey, grasping it, murmured in a low voice—

"I knew you were hard pushed, Miss Catherine, and I made bold to loan you the money till better days."

"Nay, nay!" cried Catherine, "you must take it back. I can pay my own debts! and," she added, seeing his face sadden, "don't think, Geoffrey, that I'm not glad and grateful for what you've done. I shall never forget it, never! But I want help from no man, not even from you; and I came over to say as much to the Gaffer, and to pay him with my own hands."

Here George, who had been lingering in the background, stepped forward and said—

"It's all right, Geoffrey! Catherine's a rich woman now!"

The Gaffer started and sat bolt upright in his chair; Geoffrey gazed in stupefaction at his mistress, who broke out into sunny laughter.

"'Cast your bread upon the waters,' says the proverb," she said. "Farmer Adams has left me all he had in the world; and why? Just because I went over to him now and then when he was sick, and made him a posset of elder wine."

The Gaffer rose trembling to his feet, and gasped for breath.

70 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

"Old Adams !" he cried. "Why, he was worth  
• 'tween ten and fifteen thousand pound !"

"Whatever he was worth," said Catherine, smiling, "he has left to your humble servant ! So you see, Gaffer, I'm not going to be sold up this time."

"Nay, nay, Miss Catherine," returned the old man, his eyes full of sympathy and admiration, "you know that was only my fun—— Jarge, Jarge, what are you standing and gaping at ? Can't you offer Miss Catherine a chair !"

## CHAPTER VI.

### SUITORS THREE.

Say, Shepherds, what d' ye seek ? The red rose or the yellow ?  
The red blush-rose o' Love !—or the rose of shining gold ?  
A maiden in her smock may tempt some silly fellow,  
But yellow-boys and guinea-blooms are brighter twenty fold !—  
*The Shepherd's Wooing.*

It was by no means all work and no play with Catherine Thorpe. It had never been so. Even in her worst days, when she had been compelled to look regretfully at every shilling before she spent it, she had always been willing to spend a certain amount on simple pleasures for the gratification of those who worked for her, and especially for the gratification of Bridget.

“Passel of vules,” the Gaffer used to say when he received an invitation to go and partake of some homely feast or supper at the farm. “But there, 'tis like wimmen volk, they be *all* a passel o' fools !”

Still, he invariably went, and ate the food that had

been prepared, even while he scorned the liberality which provided it.

And now, with one fickle turn of Fortune's wheel, all was changed. Catherine was an heiress, and an heiress can do no wrong; so when, as an earnest of what she meant to do with her money, Catherine announced that there would be no frugal supper this year, but a right royal one, and that to the supper would be added a dance to which nearly all the country-side would be bidden, no one, not even the Gaffer, had a word to say. These festivities, however, were not to interfere with the work; they were to come as a reward for labour, not as a means of stimulating activity. The grass was all mown, but there was the hay to be made, and not till it was all tossed, carted, and stacked would Catherine give one thought to gaiety.

She and Bridget had breakfasted alone. The moment the meal was over Catherine put on her sunbonnet and took her hayfork in her hand.

"Why, where are you going, Catherine?" asked Bridget, in surprise.

"Up to the hayfields, little one," answered Catherine, smiling, "to see if the haymakers are working, and to lend a hand, too, maybe. To-day the sun is

shining ; it may rain to-morrow, and then our crop would be damaged."

"What would that matter to us?" said Bridget, pouting. "You are an heiress now, Catherine!"

"An heiress!" returned Catherine, dreamily. "Yes, but that doesn't mean that I'm a drone. The farm's a beehive still, and I'm the queen-bee."

Bridget looked at her and laughed.

"How do you feel now that you have so much money?"

"Much the same as I did before," answered Catherine. "No, I don't, though—I feel glad that I can pay my debts, glad that I can make a lady of *you*, Bridget."

Bridget rose, and put her arms about her sister's neck.

"For me, for me, always for me," she said. "Tell me, Catherine, why are you always thinking of me?"

"Because I love you, little one!" The words were simple, they were simply spoken, but they meant so much. When folk wondered why Catherine Thorpe kept such a brave heart through all her troubles, why she toiled from morning till night like any slave, they little knew that the only thing that was her solace, the only bright spot to her in this



dreary, humdrum waste of life, was her love for her "little sister."

"You'll follow me, won't you?" said Catherine, as she moved towards the door. "It will do you good to have a toss at the hay; there's plenty of sunshine and fun up at the five-acre."

Bridget nodded; and Catherine, looking more like a farm-servant than an owner of golden thousands, went up to the work in the field.

The haymakers had been busy since early dawn, and when she arrived on the scene they were still working with a will. Passing through the field and cheering the labourers with nods and kind words, she hurried towards a shady spot near to the gate, looking on every hand for Geoffrey, whom she had not seen that morning. Instead of finding him, however, she came upon a group the sight of which amused her not a little.

There, gathered together under the spreading branches of an oak-tree, dressed up in their holiday best, and all looking extremely foolish, were Mr. Marsh, the Doctor, and last, but not least, the Gaffer! The latter wore, in addition to a tail coat and trousers of the last generation, an extremely high-collared and somewhat ragged white shirt, and a tall chimney-

pot hat. Mr. Marsh carried a large posy of freshly cut flowers.

"Heyday," cried Catherine, as she came upon the group, "here's fine company !"

At the sound of her voice they all started, turned towards her, and simultaneously took off their hats.

"Good morning, Miss Catherine," they cried, each and all giving her a most respectful bow.

Catherine laughed outright.

"Have you been to a wedding," she cried, "that you are dressed so gaily ?"

"No," replied the Doctor, smiling and answering for all ; "but we hope to go to one some day !"

"Some day !" they all repeated, smiling ; and then they sighed.

Catherine stared at them in amazement ; then suddenly the truth seemed to dawn upon her.

"It can't be," she thought, "and yet it *must* be. Bridget's right. The men who despised the maid are running after the money."

"Miss Catherine," said Marsh, advancing and offering his flowers, "will you allow me ?"

"For me, Mr. Marsh ?"

The little man nodded.

"For you, Miss Catherine," he said, "a few simple

76 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

flowers of the earth. I gathered them for you myself."

"Thank you, Mr. Marsh."

Catherine loved flowers ; she took the posy and buried her face in it, and as she did so the Gaffer approached and whispered in her ear.

"I want a word with 'ee alone."

Catherine started, raised her head, and laughed aloud.

"What ! *you* too, Gaffer ! " she cried.

"And why not ? " answered the Gaffer sharply.

"I'm better than a passel o' vules ! "

"Anything more ? " asked Catherine ; upon which hint the Doctor stepped forward and spoke for all.

"What your friends want, Miss Catherine," he said, "is to know how they can help you, be useful to you ? "

Catherine laughed merrily.

"Oh, that is it, is it ? " she cried. "Of course you can all help me if you have the will. Here, Thomas, Silas ! " she cried to the haymakers, "bestir yourselves ; bring these gentlemen hayforks. They are all going to help us to-day."

"Hayforks ! " cried the Doctor, aghast.

"Yes, hayforks ! " returned Catherine, still with a

merry twinkle in her eye. "You all wish to help me, you know, and your wishes shall be gratified. There's plenty of work for all of you, and fun into the bargain. You shall help to turn over the hay in this field, and afterwards you shall assist to load the waggon in the other. There," she continued, as the hayforks were brought to her, "there's one for you, Doctor, one for you, Mr. Marsh, and Gaffer, the last one is for you! Oh, what a blessing you've all come! We were short-handed, and I was wondering however we were to get in the hay before we lost the sunshine."

They all took the forks. Having got them, they stood looking at Catherine and smiling awkwardly. Dutton, the doctor, turned his about in his hand as if it were some curious kind of implement which he had never seen before.

"How do you work the thing?" he said. "So?"

"Yes, that's the way," answered Catherine, merrily. "Only don't throw the stuff over your head, as if you were having a hay-bath. Now, then," clapping her hands and laughing, "begin, all of you, and the best worker shall win the prize! That's the way," she continued, as they all began to work with a will. "Right up the field and back again!"

"Miss Catherine," said Dutton, edging towards her ; but Catherine waved him back.

"No talking till work is over, Doctor," she said.

"Wait here," whispered the Gaffer, "I must speak to 'ee, Miss Catherine," at which they all cried—"Fair play ! Fair play !"

They set to work with a will, while Catherine stood watching them with an amused smile. Suddenly she heard a sound behind her, and turning, she found herself standing face to face with Geoffrey Doone.

In a moment her face changed and became serious.

"Ah, Geoffrey," she cried, "I was wondering where you were !"

"I had to ride over to town about that new machine."

"You look tired."

"Well, it was a long ride !"

"I'm going to scold you," said Catherine. "You're the only one in all the place who hasn't congratulated me !"

The man looked at her ; then he cast down his eyes.

"I'm very, very glad," he said.

"I am *sure* you are."

She held out her hand to him, but, as he did not take it, she let it drop again by her side.

"You see, Miss Catherine"—he began, but she quickly interrupted him.

"'Miss Catherine!'" she cried; "I won't talk to you if you speak like that! I'm Catherine to you, Geoffrey, now and always!"

Suddenly she caught sight of the amateur hay-makers and burst into a merry laugh.

"Just look at them, Geoffrey!" she cried; "there they go puffing and perspiring!"

"What are they doing?"

"Doing? Why, making *donkeys* of themselves! Ah, dear, what changes a bit of money brings!"

"It does, indeed!" said Geoffrey, with a sigh.

"Ah, but not with *you*," answered Catherine, quickly. "But isn't it strange? Up to yesterday, when I was poor, I'd scarcely had an offer, and now I do believe every one of those silly men is ready to swear that he has always loved me."

"Not the Gaffer, surely?" returned Geoffrey, smiling.

"Yes, even the Gaffer," she answered, laughing; "unless——"

80 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

She paused suddenly and turned away her head, but not before Geoffrey had noted the sudden pallor and then the sudden blush. For a moment there was silence, then the man spoke again.

"Is George Kingsley over here to-day?" he asked quickly.

She turned quickly and gave one swift glance at his face.

"No!" she answered; "what made you think of *him*?"

"I don't know!"

He walked a little bit away from her, switching at the hedge with his riding-whip. Then he returned, and found her still gazing thoughtfully at the ground.

"Catherine!" he said.

"Yes, Geoffrey."

"I'm sorry you did not let me help you yesterday; I'm almost sorry that you didn't *need* my help. Now you are rich I can do nothing for you, and I wanted to do so much."

"And so you can," said Catherine, frankly.

"How?"

She laughed lightly, but, as it seemed to him, a little forcedly.

"Well, first and foremost, you can advise me, which of these silly men shall I choose, if he asks me?"

"You ought to know best."

"Should I? Well! first, there's Mr. Dutton. He's worth considering, surely, a fine doctor and an old soldier—but—I won't be doctored! Am I right?"

"Quite right!"

"Then comes little Mr. Marsh. He's a gay man is Marsh" (here she mimicked his piping voice), "but I think I'll leave him to somebody more deserving."

"You've left out the Gaffer!"

"The Gaffer? Oh, *he* isn't serious, and he's had three wives already!"

She turned towards Geoffrey; he was regarding her with a thoughtful, troubled look; twice he seemed about to speak, but he remained dumb.

"What are you thinking about, Geoffrey?" she asked.

"I was wondering if there is anyone else you care for—anyone you *love*."

"For a *husband*, do you mean?"

"Yes, for a husband!"

She shrugged her shoulders.



"If ever I *did* marry, and it isn't likely, it would be someone who cared for *me*, not for my money."

"Yes, yes!" he cried, bending eagerly towards her.

"But there's no hurry," she continued, with an awkward laugh. "I've Bridget to settle first, you know. She's so pretty, she ought to make a good match some day, when she's older; but of course she's only a child now, she doesn't know what love *is*."

Very quietly he took her hand in his.

"Do *you*, Catherine?" he asked earnestly.

Catherine blushed vividly and turned her head away.

"I?" she said. "Well, I don't know. You see, I'm not one of your pretty ones, and I've had too much to think of."

"Will you promise me one thing, Catherine?"

"Of course I will! What is it?"

"It is this! I want you to promise me that if ever someone you could care for comes to you and asks you to be his wife you will speak to me, you will let me be the first to know!"

She looked up into his eyes frankly and openly.

"As if I should not do so!" she said. "Why,

Geoffrey, that is just what I should do. There's no one I can trust like you, for haven't you been a brother to me all my life?"

He dropped her hand and turned from her.

"Ah, yes, of course, I ought to have known," he said. "Well, I think I must be going now, Catherine. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Geoffrey. Don't forget the dance to-night!"

"No, no, I'll not forget. I shall be there!"

He turned and left her, took his horse, which he had left tied to the gate, and rode off to see what the haymakers were about. Leaning on the gate, Catherine watched him go, but though her eyes were fixed upon him she hardly seemed to see him. She was dreaming, and Geoffrey Doone was not one of the figures in her dream.

"Is there no one I care for?" she murmured to herself, "no one I love? Ah, I couldn't answer that even to *him*. Folks mustn't know yet for fear I'm mistaken, and I may be, who knows? I wonder why he keeps away so long. Has my good luck made him afraid? Oh, if he would only come now and look at me as he did when he said I was his best friend, and ask me—ask me—oh, dear, how foolish

I am ! Perhaps he doesn't love me after all ! If I thought that, I think I should hate all the world. . . George, dear George ! "

The sound of puffing and blowing made her start. Turning, she saw the Doctor approaching, hayfork in hand. He was red as a peony, and the beads of perspiration were running down his cheeks.

"Miss Catherine ! "

"Well, Mr. Dutton ! "

"I've been a soldier, and I'm a gentleman by birth ! "

"I hate soldiers, and I'm afraid of gentlemen."

"But you don't know what I was going to say ! "

"I can make a shrewd guess ! But what I say is this, Go on with your haymaking, and then you can talk to me. And, Mr. Marsh," she added, catching a glimpse of the little man in the background, "you do the same, or I'll never, never speak to you again. You've got to work on to the end of the field, remember, all of you. There ! begin, begin, or you'll find the sun sinking before you've half done."

Still puffing and perspiring, they moved off to do as they were bidden, and as they did so the Gaffer came forward, groaning and holding his side.

"Ah, Gaffer ! " said Catherine, merrily, "I'm afraid you're out of breath ! "

"Let be ! let be ! I'll be all right directly. We was allus good friends, wasn't we, Catherine ?"

"Yes," returned Catherine, drily, "especially when you wanted to sell up the farm."

"Only my fun ! I was allus fond of 'ee, Catherine ! and you see, Missie, our lands jine together, and it would be downright sinful to keep them apart, wouldn't it now ? I be an old man, but I be tough and well seasoned, and I've heaps of brass. But maybe you wouldn't look at an old chap like me ?"

Catherine pursed her lips and gravely shook her head.

"No, I don't think so. It says in the Bible one mustn't marry one's grandfather."

"Well, well, I was only jokin' like. I don't want 'ee, but there's someone else as does. Whisper, for them fools are maybe listening. What would 'ee say to my son Jarge ?"

As he spoke he glanced keenly at her, noted the sudden pallor of her cheeks, then the sudden blush, and he laughed softly to himself.

"George," said Catherine, with a sort of gasp.

"George, did you say ?"

"Ay, Jarge. I meant him for thee all along, and

I know he allus favoured 'ee, Catherine. He's a fine young lad and he loves 'ee dearly?"

"*He* loves *me*? Are you sure? Did he—did he—ask you to tell me that?"

For a moment the Gaffer seemed to hesitate; then he said boldly: "Why, of course, or how could I ha' thought of it? You see he be bashful; he's afraid that now you be a rich young woman"—

"Yes, yes, I understand!" she murmured to herself.

"Say you'll ha' him and the thing's done. I know you like him, don't 'ee now? Come!"

Catherine cast down her eyes.

"I—I don't hate him," she said; "and if he loves me as you say"—

"Love 'ee! 'Father,' he's said to me a dozen times, 'I can't *live* without Catherine.' But what be the matter? You be crying?"

"No, no," answered Catherine, quickly. "Tell George if he really likes me so much, tell him—tell him—ah, I can't speak, but *you* know!"

"You'll *marry* him?" asked the Gaffer, eagerly.

"Yes, I'll marry him!" she said, as if dazed and stupefied.

"Well, then, 'tis settled. Come into my arms and gi'e me a kiss to make it a bargain."

He put his arm around her shoulders and she yielded to his embrace. As she did so there was a cry; it came from the panting pair of suitors who had quietly returned and were looking on.

"Here, come, what's this?" they cried, "You don't mean to say"—

"I mean to say," answered the Gaffer, smiling maliciously, "that she's chosen the best man, that's all!"

"Chosen *you*—Miss Catherine?" cried Dutton and Marsh in a breath.

"There, there, keep back both of you and don't look so astonished!" cried Catherine, entering into the humour of the situation. "Yes, the Gaffer is right! I've chosen, and if you doubt it, look there! and there!"

So saying she placed both her hands on the Gaffer's shoulders and, very much to his amazement, kissed him roundly on both cheeks. Then she seized her fork and ran off, and was soon hard at work helping the haymakers.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE GREEN LANES.

For her love I carke and care,  
For her love I droop and dare,  
For her all my bliss is bare,  
And I wax wan !  
For her love in sleep I slake,  
For her love all night I wake,  
For her love I mourning make  
More than any man !—*Love-longing* (A.D. 1300).

WHILE Catherine dreamed as she tossed the hay,  
Bridget dreamed as she walked in the green ways.

She was a thing of light and air and sunshine, frail and slight as one of the gossamer threads floating from tree to tree. Slipping from the house, she tripped, parasol in hand, until she gained the shadows, which she loved because they were gentle to her complexion. She listened to the sound of the distant haymaking, then looked admiringly at her pretty white hands. She did not wish to have them tanned with the sun like Catherine's, neither did she wish to have them broadened and made coarse like the hands of a farm-

servant. There was plenty of time for the haymaking, despite what Catherine had said ; the fine weather would last and the crops could be got in without *her* help. So, instead of going up to the five-acre, she lost herself among the lanes.

After she had sauntered for a while she sat down on a grassy bank and began to think, whereupon there happened what every lover thinks a miracle, but is really an everyday occurrence. Suddenly, as she sat there thinking, she became aware that she was not alone ; someone had taken a seat beside her ; someone had placed an arm around her waist ; someone was kissing her ! At first she made no attempt at resistance ; it all seemed so unreal, so much a part of her dreamy thoughts—then like a frightened bird she struggled to get free.

"I have caught you, and I hold you !" said George ; and he kissed her again.

Bridget put up her small white hand.

"You mustn't do that," she said softly.

"Why? Do you mind?"

"Well, no, it is not that," she answered simply ;  
"but you will be seen."

"Don't be afraid ; they are all too busy at work up in the hayfields. And, Bridget, listen to this. My



90 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

father is up yonder dressed in his best! What does it mean?"

"I'm sure I don't know, unless he's courting Catherine."

George laughed.

"Well, he's capable of it, now she's an heiress. What a stroke of luck for her!"

"You may well say that. It came just in time."

"I know that. . . . Bridget."

"Yes, George."

"I suppose you are wondering why I kissed you?"

"Oh, no—I mean," she continued, faltering and blushing, "I ought to be wondering why I *let* you!"

"It is the first time, Bridget," said George, tenderly taking her hand.

She did not withdraw her hand, but let it rest peacefully in his, while a soft dreamy look stole into her eyes.

"Yes," she almost whispered, "it is the first time."

"But of course you knew all about it?"

"About the kiss do you mean?" she answered, smiling.

"No; about the love which prompted it. Come, be frank with me. You knew I loved you?"

Bridget looked mischievously at him, and pouted her pretty lips.

"I'm not a witch," she said, "to know everything."

"Well, you *suspected* it, didn't you, Bridget? Somehow, I've never had the courage to speak right out to you; but now, when I'm going away, and it may be for a long time, I should like to feel that I leave someone behind me who will be thinking of me, perhaps longing for my return."

"Of course we shall all hope for that, George."

"But *you* above all?"

"Well, yes, of course I—oh, George!" she cried impulsively, "I think, yes, I am sure, I *did* know, and it made me very happy."

"Then you care for me as I care for you?"

"Yes—oh, yes; I care for you."

"And by-and-bye, when I have a house to offer you, you will be my little wife?"

"Yes, George!"

"Then, as a token, kiss *me* as I kissed *you*."

At this request her face became crimson. She covered it with both her hands.

"I couldn't; oh, I couldn't!" she cried.

He took her hands from her face and held them firmly.

"To prove your love, Bridget," he said, "come kiss me just once."

He bent his face towards her. She looked up at him, blushed, hesitated, then she kissed him lightly on the cheek. In a moment her imprisoned hands were free. The young man's arms were around her, while his kisses rained upon her cheek, her eyes, her lips; and between each kiss his voice murmured passionately: "Ah, Bridget, how I love you!"

This unrehearsed love-scene had had a spectator; none other indeed than Geoffrey the overseer. Sauntering leisurely through the neighbouring field, he had heard the sound of voices, and, on looking over the hedge, he had seen the lovers locked in each other's arms.

Without more ado he leapt the hedge and suddenly stood within a few yards of the pair.

The lovers started asunder; then, recognising the intruder, George regained possession of Bridget's hand while she stood blushing beside him.

"Miss Bridget," said Geoffrey quietly, "your sister's up yonder in the hayfield looking for you."

"I'll go to her," said the girl. Looking into the face of the young man beside her, she added: "You will come with me, won't you, George?"

Before the young man could reply, Geoffrey laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"I have a word or two to say to George," he said.  
"Run away alone, Miss Bridget."

"I'll follow," said George, quickly. "Wait for me in the hayfield!"

"Very well," answered Bridget, and she tripped away through the shadows, filling them with her own sunshine.

Both men stood watching her as she went. When a bend in the lane hid her from their sight, Geoffrey turned to George.

"So that is how the land lies?" he said.

"Yes," answered George.

He was still looking at the spot where the girl had disappeared.

"What will the Gaffer say?"

"I neither know nor care. We're parting company."

"And—and Catherine? Does *she* know?"

"I've never told her. This is the first time I've dared to tell anyone outright, even Bridget. But Catherine and I are the best of friends, and I'm sure she'll be glad to hear the news."

"I hope so, my lad, but women are strange some-

times. I've just seen her in the field looking brighter and happier than she has looked for many a long day. While I was with the haymakers she came and joined them and began to work with a will ; but just before she came up she had been with the Gaffer. They had been as confidential as if they shared some merry secret together. Poor Catherine ! I hope her happiness will last, but sudden changes often bring rain and storms. Promise me one thing : don't tell her of this to-day."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of. I shall leave it to Bridget."

"Warn the little one not to talk of it either, to-day."

"But why ?"

"Never mind. Catherine has her humours like all of us ; she might think you had not been quite open with her. Well, well, take my advice—a friend's advice. And now your hand. I wish you luck."

"Thank you," answered George. "And now may I wish *you* luck also ?"

Geoffrey started.

"Me !" he replied. "What do you mean ?"

"A lover's eyes can read the heart, Geoffrey," said

George. "What I feel for the little one, you feel for Catherine."

"I? Oh, nonsense!"

"Come, what is there to be ashamed of?"

"Nothing," said Geoffrey, "only I don't wear my heart upon my sleeve like you youngsters. . . . And if I *did* care for Catherine, what then?"

"I should say you were the only man in the world who deserved her."

"Loving and deserving don't always dwell together."

"In your case they do."

"I'm not vain enough to think that, George," said Geoffrey, quickly. "And, besides, if I did, what would it matter? Women are like birds; they choose their mates to please their fancy; a sweet voice and fine feathers have the best chance both in house and hedgerow. And you, a lover, ought to have learned this long ago: a bird knows by instinct when it pleases, and a man knows by the same token when he has no chance."

"Why do you talk like that, Geoffrey? I'm sure Catherine respects and likes you above all men."

"Likes and respects me!" returned Geoffrey, bitterly. "Ah, that's the pang of it: liking and respect-

ing don't make the sort of match by which the birds pair. Hark to that, George!" he continued. "Yonder's the lark singing, and if you strain your ears you'd hear the mother-bird answering below. There's no 'liking' and 'respecting' there! It's music out of the full heart. It's the pleasure of life itself. It's the sunshine of blind and happy *love*."

"Speak to her. I am sure she loves you."

"Let be, let be," said Geoffrey, sadly. "I must bide my time, lad, and do you take the advice of one older than yourself, and bide yours. Don't speak to Catherine to-day, and don't let the little one do it, either. Let the sun shine while it will; clouds and rain will follow soon enough."

The two men parted, but at five o'clock that afternoon they met again, up in the hayfield. Here they found toil still going on, and among the workers was Catherine, while Bridget stood at a distance calmly looking on. Catherine, who seemed radiantly happy, had placed herself at the head of a pair of fat white oxen which were yoked to the haycart.

"Come now, work away!" she cried. "Pile on the load and forward, for there will be rain."

Suddenly her eye fell upon the two men who had







BRIDGET LAUGHED AND BLUSHED AS SHE FELT HIS ARMS  
ABOUT HER.—Page 97.

come up. She stepped forward at once to speak to them.

"Geoffrey ! George !" she said.

"How bright you look !" said Geoffrey.

"Do I ?" answered Catherine. "Well, I think I never felt so happy !"

"There, the work's done, the waggon is loaded !" cried the Doctor.

"Then up with you, little one, to crown it," said Catherine, laughing merrily. "Come, George, lift Bridget on to the hay !"

Nothing loth, George stepped forward to do as he was bidden, while Bridget laughed and blushed as she felt his arms about her.

"There !" he said, when he had deposited her safely on the top of the load, where she sat perched, parasol in hand.

"Well done !" cried Catherine, clapping her hands,

"Jarge ! Jarge !" said the Gaffer, pulling at his coat.

"Well ?"

"Where ha' you been ? Every other person has been congratulating Catherine on her good luck, and now it be your turn !"

Frank and honestly George turned to Catherine and extended his hand.

"I do congratulate you, Catherine, with all my heart," he said.

"Buss her, lad! buss her!" cried the Gaffer. "Eh, now, she's blushing and holding out her cheek!"

It was true. Blushing vividly, and with eyes downcast, Catherine held up her cheek for the young man's salute. He kissed her. A few paces off stood Geoffrey, quietly and sadly looking on. In a moment Catherine recovered herself.

"Come, that's enough of foolishness," she said. "Forward!"

Amid the shouts of the haymakers the waggon moved forward, leaving only the Gaffer and Geoffrey behind.

"Eh, you be there, Master Geoffrey," said the Gaffer, "looking sour, and dour as usual."

"Think so?" answered Geoffrey, carelessly.

"Don't I know it?" said Gaffer. "And shall I tell 'ee what you be thinking about? You be thinking that who's cock o' the walk one day bean't *allus* cock o' the walk, and that Master Geoffrey mun make way soon for my son Jarge."

"What do you mean?" asked Geoffrey.

"I mean that she's ta'en him for better or for worse, and that they'll have my loving blessing."

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 99

"Do you mean to tell me that she's going to marry him?"

"Make no mistake about that."

"But he—he"——

"He's a young vule!" returned the Gaffer, bitterly.

"But he'll ne'er quarrel wi' such good fortune; the best match in all the world. Will 'ee come wi' me and congratulate her? No? Well, mebbe you be best away!"

The Gaffer moved off in the direction which the haycart had taken, and left Geoffrey alone.

"No," he said to himself. "I can't look her in the face, knowing what I do. Poor Catherine! And she said 'twas the happiest day of all her life!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GAFFER IS BUSY.

Who plays with Love doth play with flame,  
Who lightlies Love shall sink in shame,  
So, men and maids, take warning !—*Old Ballad.*

EARLY the next morning both Catherine and Bridget were astir making preparations for the dance which was to crown the haymaking. The hearts of both were full of joy which they could not express. Bridget gazed in wonder upon Catherine, thinking she had never seen her look so happy, and Catherine looked at Bridget with puzzled eyes, thinking she had never seen her look so fair.

"It must be the money," thought Bridget, when she heard Catherine singing little scraps of song. "Ah, dear ! how she must have hated being poor, when money can make her so joyful."

Then she fell to thinking of George, and her eyes sparkled and her bosom heaved with joy.

"He will come to-night," she thought. "I shall

dance with him. He will be beside me all the time. Dear George ! I will ask him if I may tell Catherine to-night."

She was glad that Catherine had become rich, and that riches seemed to bring her so much happiness. Her love for George seemed less selfish now. Had Catherine remained poor and downcast, surrounded by debts and duns, with no comfort in the world but the presence of her sister, Bridget would have found it so hard to confess to George that she loved him, it would have seemed like sacrilege to Catherine—like taking from her a part of something which should have been wholly hers. But now the case was altered. She could not explain why it was, but she felt a subtle instinct within her, which told her that during the last twenty-four hours a change had come over both of them. She no longer felt that in loving George she was false to her sister ; perhaps it was because she felt that she was no longer the one thing which held sole possession of her sister's heart. So, while Catherine worked and thought, Bridget stitched and dreamed.

Both were silent, but both were very happy. Presently Catherine paused in her work and looked at her sister. Their eyes met.

"Of what are you thinking, little one?" asked Catherine.

"Of you, Catherine!"

"Of *me*?" said her sister in surprise, "and what were you thinking of *me*?"

"I was thinking how happy you have been since yesterday. Ah, dear, what changes money can make!"

"The money; yes, yes, it is the money, little one," returned Catherine, laughing. "It gives one happiness, as you say!"

"I hope it will never come between you and me!" said Bridget, thoughtfully.

In a moment her sister was beside her, kissing her passionately.

"Never say that again, Bridget, and never think it. Nothing could come between us. You believe that, don't you, little one?" she added, stroking her cheek.

"Yes," said Bridget, "I believe it."

"And now you are crying," continued Catherine. "You are foolish, Bridget. Look brighter, or I shall think you are not glad to see me happy. There, there! run away to the barn and see how the work is going forward. Everything must be gay to-night!"



"RUN AWAY TO THE BARN AND SEE HOW THE WORK IS GOING ON," SAID CATHERINE.  
... BRIDGET PUT ON HER HAT TO DO HER BIDDING. — Page 102.





There soon came sunshine through the shower. Bridget put on her hat, and, after blowing a kiss to Catherine, ran off to do her bidding. Catherine gazed thoughtfully at the door through which she had passed.

"Can the child suspect?" she thought. "Ah! no, it is not possible, and I could not tell her; she is such a child she would not understand. Well, her turn will come some day—after a long time, perhaps—and then she too will be happy."

There came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Catherine, and the Gaffer entered.

He approached Catherine and embraced her affectionately.

"My daughter!" he said. "Well, what did I tell 'ee?"

"Have you spoken to him?" asked Catherine blushing and trembling.

"Just a word! He can't quite believe yet, poor lad, that he's so lucky, and, besides, he be so bashful. But, look! I was to give 'ee this!"

"A ring!" said Catherine, amazed.

"His own mother's: all solid gold. He thought 'twould come prettily to show how much he loved 'ee."

Catherine took the ring and kissed it.

"How good of him!" she said. "I'll wear it till I die."

"Or till parson changes it for another," said the Gaffer, slyly. "Ah, but you seem dreadful fond of him!"

"I love him," answered Catherine, smiling. "I've loved him ever since I can remember. But when I was poor I thought 'twas useless hoping and dreaming, for you were a rich man and he was your son. But now it's different. I can answer him with a full heart and bring him all I have!"

"The land! the money!" said the Gaffer, eagerly. "Not that he cares for that, poor vule," he continued by way of apology, "he's so mad with love for 'ee. Say, Catherine, there be one I know who didn't relish to see my Jarge kissing thee so bravely."

"Who?"

"Why, overseer, of course. Master Geoffrey's trying to spoil sport."

"Geoffrey Doone has no right"—began Catherine——

"Of course, of course," said the Gaffer, slyly, "but he'd like to keep cock o' the walk still. But when you're wedded he'll go about his business, eh?"

"Nay, he'll be overseer still," returned Catherine. "He has been my best friend; I owe all I have to him."

"Why, look, there be Jarge!" cried the Gaffer. Catherine turned and saw George standing in the doorway.

"Good morning, Catherine," said the young fellow, "where's Bridget? By the way," he added, stepping forward, "what do you think I heard this morning—why, that my father has proposed for you and that you are going to marry him, and here I find him!" He added, laughing, "I confess it looks rather suspicious!"

"A good joke that, eh, Catherine?" said the Gaffer, laughing nervously and looking anxiously from one to the other.

"Yes, indeed, a good joke," answered Catherine, gazing fondly at George. "I must talk to them."

"Do," said the Gaffer, "and I'll take Jarge along o' me and talk wi' *him*."

"Very well," returned Catherine. "You'll be sure to remember to-night, won't you, George?" she added. "There's to be a dance in the big barn; Bridget is there now, setting things right for it."

"Bridget in the barn!" said George, turning

towards the door. "May I go and help her, Catherine?"

"Yes," answered Catherine, "go and help her! And, George, thank you for your gift. It was so good of you, so like yourself."

"My gift?" said George, making a movement towards her, but his father promptly held him back.

"Leave Jarge to me now," he said; "he's narvous. He'll be wi' 'ee to-night."

"Ah, yes, to-night at the dance," said Catherine. "You must come to me, George, remember. And your father is right to take you away. You must not speak to me now. I'm so happy that another word would make me cry!"

Utterly puzzled and amazed, George was about to reply, but he was seized in a strong grip, hurried out of the kitchen, and not till he had left the farm several yards behind was he allowed to speak.

Then he turned to his father.

"What is the matter with her?" he asked. "What makes her seem so strange?"

The old man grinned with delight.

"My doing," he said. "Shake hands, Jarge; I've got thousands o' pounds for 'ee and fifteen hundred acres o' vine land. You've only to take them."

"I don't understand," said George, who certainly looked sorely puzzled.

"Then you're a vule," returned his father, sharply. "I've got 'ee the farm and the money, and Catherine too. She'll have 'ee, she'll have 'ee! She's mad wi' love for 'ee already!"

"Catherine loves *me*!" said George; "nonsense, we're like brother and sister—that's all!"

"Brother and sister! Why, I ha' told her you're ready to marry her if she'll only say the word."

"You told her *that*?" cried George, angrily.

"Yes, I did!"

"Then you told her a falsehood. I don't love her!" The Gaffer grinned.

"Well, love be a detail. You be agoin' to *marry* her!"

"Never!"

"She's got all the brass and all the land."

"What are they to me?"

"Everything, unless you be a born vule. Don't 'ee go and break my heart, Jarge; don't 'ee go and tell me you favour someone else."

"But I do favour someone else!"

"You do? Who is it? Who is it? *Not* the little sister?"

"Yes ; Bridget ! And she has promised to be my wife !"

The old man ground his teeth and clenched his fist.

"Take care, Jarge," he cried. "Don't 'ee provoke me ! Don't 'ee tell me you're running after that penniless wench. Flying in the face o' Providence ! Think o' the money—think o' the land !"

"I have told you that I care for neither !" returned the young man, coldly. "I'm going to London to fight my own way ; with what I can gain and the bit of money my mother left me"—

"You can't touch that without my will !"

"It's left in your keeping for my use, it's mine, and I mean to have it."

"Not a penny !"

"The law will make you give it up."

"Take the law against your father !" said the old man, whining a little, "against him who's planned all for your good ! Come, come, Jarge, listen to reason. Don't be a mad, headstrong vule. Marry Catherine."

"I cannot, even if she cares for me. It is Bridget that I love !"

"Vule of vules !" cried the old man, angrily, "wanting to take that pale-faced, penniless chit

when Catherine is yours for the asking. 'Tis Bridget who's done this! I should like to strangle her wi' my own hands!"

"Take care! no threats against her!"

"Ye won't marry Catherine?"

"No, never!"

"And you'll marry the sister?"

"Yes, for I love her!"

"You sha'n't, I'll kill 'ee first!" cried the old man. In a moment he sprang upon his son, and seizing him by the throat, shook him violently. George, who was much the stronger of the two, submitted for a few moments, then he quietly released himself.

"Keep your hands off me," he said.

"Keep my hands off 'ee!" screamed the old man. "I'd like to tear 'ee into bits, and *her* too, the scheming, smiling, pale-faced hussy! But you sha'n't ha' her! you sha'n't ha' her! or if ye ha' her ye shall starve! D'ye hear? Starve! So mind what I've told ye!"

This time George did not answer, but followed his father in the direction of the barn where Catherine had said Bridget was working. He had not gone far, however, when he met Bridget running rapidly towards him, her face pale and anxious.



"Where are you going, George?" she asked as the young man took her hand.

"I was going to look for you, Bridget," he replied. "Catherine told me you were in the big barn making ready for the dance."

"Has anything happened?" she continued, noting the grave expression of his face. "What is the matter with your father. He passed me just now, looking white as death, and when I tried to speak to him he shook his clenched fist in my face."

The young man laughed uneasily, and stroked the girl's cheek.

"No fool like an old one, Bridget," he said. "He's been meddling as usual."

"But how?"

"Well, I'm almost ashamed to tell you; it's so absurd. He wants me—you won't be angry, Bridget, if I tell you?"

"Of course not."

"Well, he wants me to marry Catherine!"

"What?"

"Worse than that he's actually spoken to her about it."

"What?" said Bridget again, and she laughed heartily.

"I hope she won't mind," said George.

"I'm sure she won't ! I understand now why she's so merry and full of fun, laughing every minute. A little while ago she caught me around the waist and kissed me, and then she said, still laughing: 'Oh ! those silly men ! They won't leave me alone now I've got money. But we'll lead them a fine dance, won't we, Bridget ?'"

"That's just like her. Have you told her about our engagement ?"

"Not yet. I mean to tell her to-night, when the dance is over and everybody is gone. I'm sure she thinks you like me."

"My face has been a tell-tale, eh ?"

"Perhaps. But your father, he'll never forgive you, I'm afraid !"

"Then he must do the other thing. I'm not a chattel to be hawked about in the market as he pleases. Listen, darling : you must promise to be very good and to wait patiently till I've a home to offer you."

"Of course I'll wait. I'm not in a hurry to marry."

"All girls say that !"

"But I *mean* it. I'm very happy as I am."

112 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

"But you love me?"

She looked up laughing.

"Will you come with me to the barn?" she said;  
"there is still much to do, and you might be useful."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A THUNDERBOLT.

We were two sisters of one race. . .  
She was the fairest in the face.—*Tennyson.*

THE dance in the big barn was a huge success, the fun boisterous, the refreshment copious, and everybody full of natural merriment. From Jabez the herd to Dutton the doctor, from Jasper the shepherd to Mr. Marsh the tax-collector, from Amandy the dairymaid to Catherine and Bridget, there was nothing but fun, freedom, and equality. The Gaffer was there with his son, both looking a little anxious ; but when George led out Catherine for the country dance the old man seemed relieved.

The evening was wellnigh spent, but the merriment was still at its height, when Catherine slipped from the crowded barn and stole away far from the sound of music and merriment to the quiet solemn beauty of the moonlit fields.

She wished to be alone—to think—to ask herself if her cup of happiness were indeed full, or if the bitter

had already begun to mingle with the sweet of love.

That morning, all that day in fact, she had counted herself the happiest woman in the world. But human happiness is never supreme; be one's joy ever so great it never seems more than an earnest of a greater joy to follow, and though Catherine had spent the day in the realisation of the one great joy of her life, yet she had looked forward to the evening as a time when her happiness would reach its very height. Love had brought her gladness; how, then, could that gladness be complete without the presence of the one being whom she loved better than her life?

In the evening, she thought, George would come; he would take her hand, he would whisper in her ear that he loved her; he would kiss her, perhaps; and with those words ringing in her ear, that kiss fresh upon her lips, she felt that she could die. But, now that she was alone, Catherine was fain to confess that her joy had received a check. True, George had come—he had taken her hand—he had danced with her—he had looked into her eyes—he had called her Catherine—"dear Catherine!" He had congratulated her before them all—he had rejoiced in her good fortune, because he said her happiness was as dear

to him as his own. And yet there was something in his manner which she could not understand—something which seemed to check her ardour, and which kept her tongue tied when she was burning to whisper in his ear "George, I love you!"

Wondering and dreaming, she wandered she knew not whither. At last she sat down upon a grassy bank and held her hand to her head. Something cold touched her forehead: she looked at her hand. It was George's ring! His ring! Yes, there it was, shining upon her finger—the little golden circlet which he had sent her as a pledge of his love.

"It is all real," she murmured. "I am selfish in my happiness. I want too much; it should be enough for me to know that he loves me as I love him."

She kissed the ring again and again and again; then, propping her chin in her hand, she sat gazing dreamily at the dimly moonlit meadows. She sat for some time lost in thought.

Suddenly the sound of voices struck on her ear. She listened. She was not the only wanderer that night! The sound came nearer; two figures were approaching the spot where she sat.

Instinctively, she never knew why, she leant

farther back into the shadow of the hedge. Nearer came the sound. Suddenly Catherine's heart gave a great throb; she had recognised the voices: one belonged to Bridget, the other to George Kingsley.

She sat still, scarcely breathing. The sound of the voices ceased, but the figures came on. They paused close to the spot where Catherine was waiting. Their backs were towards her—by stretching out her hand she could almost have touched the hem of Bridget's dress.

They stood close together; Bridget was clinging to George's arm. He was looking down at her—she was looking up at him.

Presently he spoke.

"It doesn't seem real," he said. "But it is true, Bridget; you love me!"

"Well, yes, I do love you, of course."

"Of course," he said, and he kissed her. Bridget laughed softly.

"You must get your father to consent," she said.

"Well, I will try—but he is stubborn."

"Like his son."

"And having once got into his head that I ought to marry the heiress he'll be a long time coming round."

"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE." 117

"What a strange idea," said Bridget, "to think of your marrying Catherine!"

"It *was* strange! You see, what weighed with the old man was the money and the land."

"And *I* have neither."

"You have what I prize far more—your own dear little self."

Bridget laughed again, and again he bent down and kissed her. She put up her hand to turn his face away.

"You must be more respectful," she said. "Come, let us return to the barn."

"There is plenty of time."

"No: we must return, or we shall be missed."

They moved on again—their voices sank to a murmur—then they died, and all was still. The moonbeams still trembled on the meadow, the cool night breeze kissed Catherine's cheek, but she did not stir. The silence all around her was broken by one sound which dinned incessantly in her ears—

"*I love you! I love you!*"

Presently she rose and stood at her full height. As she did so, her limbs began to tremble: she clutched at the air as if for support.

"My God! what is it?" she thought, "what is



this coming over me !—it feels like death ! He loves her—they love each other ! Ah, no, it can't be true. I won't believe it—it is too horrible ; and yet I might have known it. I was too happy—it could not last. And *she*, my own sister, has come between us—she who was dearer to me than all the world. As she looked into his eyes, as his kisses fell upon her face, all my love was turned to hate : I could have *killed* her where she stood. No no !" she cried aloud. "Not that ! don't turn my heart against *her* ! the little one for whom I would have given my life !"

Slowly, languidly, she walked back towards the barn ; when she got near to it she paused again. How could she enter it?—how could she face the lights, the merriment, the people ? How could she meet Bridget and George ? She felt she could not : she must creep away, as some wounded creature creeps away to die.

The fiddles were still playing merrily ; she heard shouts of laughter. All her friends were rejoicing over her good fortune. What a mockery it all seemed !

Shivering as if with cold, she turned away, and made for the house.

All the farm-servants were up at the barn. The





"WHAT IS THE MATTER CATHERINE?" SHE SAID.—Page 119.

kitchen was empty, save for a big black retriever which slumbered near the window. As Catherine came in the creature rose and licked her hand. She sat down by the table and buried her face in her hands. The dog sat beside her, and rested his head on her knee.

Presently the tears trickled through her half-closed fingers ; she gave a great sob. She rose, paced restlessly about, then sought her own room. She seemed to be waiting for something—what that something was she could not tell.

Hours passed. It seemed an eternity to Catherine. Suddenly she heard someone stirring in the kitchen. She tried to move, but could not.

She sat before the empty grate, her hands crossed on her knees, her eyes staring vacantly before her. The door of her room opened, and a voice murmured—

"Catherine !"

It was Bridget who spoke. Catherine did not stir or speak, she seemed turned to stone. Bridget came forward and looked at her sister in alarm.

"What is the matter, Catherine ?" she said. "You are not well."

She made a movement as if to approach her, but Catherine put up her hand to keep her back.

"I am not ill," she said.

"There is something the matter!" said Bridget.  
"Tell me what it is. Tell me why you left the dance and came here all alone."

But Catherine did not answer; she put her hand to her head like one in pain, and gave a low heart-broken moan. Still wondering and terrified, Bridget again approached her and was again waved back.

"You *are* in trouble, Catherine, and you must tell me what it is that I may help you!"

"You help me!" said Catherine, bitterly. "*You!*"

"Yes, dear—who has a better right? Do not turn away from me, Catherine. I want you to be tender to me to-night, for I—ah, it seems wicked to say it when you are so sad—I am so happy. Listen, Catherine, I wish to tell you about George. He loves me—he has told me that he loves me!"

Catherine turned her white face towards her sister.

"Why do you tell me what I know already?" she said bitterly.

"You know it?" cried Bridget, "and you are glad! Oh, Catherine, tell me that you are glad."

"Glad?" she answered, still in the same hard, bitter tone. "Yes, very glad."

Bridget gave a sob.

"Catherine, Catherine," she cried, "you are angry with me ; tell me why. Perhaps you think I should have told you before, but indeed I only heard it yesterday for the first time, though, of course, I guessed. Do you think I would have kept it from you—you who have always loved me, and whom I, too, have loved so much?"

"Loved me! *You!*" said Catherine.

"Ah! yes, and you know it," returned Bridget, "and, indeed, it is because you have always liked him that I learned to love him. Don't think, Catherine that my love for him will ever change my heart towards *you*. You will always be the same to me, my sister—my own dear sister. Catherine, you are crying! What is it? Won't you tell me, dear?"

She put her arm around her sister's neck. Catherine hurriedly pushed her aside.

"Don't touch me! Don't speak to me!" she said.

"Go, and leave me to myself!"

"But you are in trouble! Something has happened!"

"Nothing, nothing!"

"You're not angry with me?"

Catherine rose impatiently to her feet.

"Why won't you leave me?" she cried. "Why

do you torture me with your presence? I tell you I am sick to death of all the world! Everything is false, even those we care for most! This is how we are punished! We give our lives away for others; we sacrifice ourselves for them; we toil and suffer for their happiness; they reward us with treachery and lies!"

"I have never lied or been treacherous to you, Catherine, I have always loved you."

"It's false!" she cried. "You have never loved me. I have reared you as if you were my own child—I have worked and slaved, and all for you—and now what is my reward? But there! that is all over; I'll work and slave no more for them that scorn me. I am rich now. I can rest; it will be your turn now. Yes, you, the fine lady, will have to work now to earn your bread!"

"Catherine! Catherine!" cried Bridget. "What are you saying? Why are you so bitter against me—you, who have always been so kind?"

"Ah! you can cry now," said Catherine, "and whine and pretend not to understand, but you can't deceive me any more. I'm past that. You have plotted and plotted, smiled and coquetted, to win his heart, and never said one word to me. But don't

tell me again that he cares for you—don't! unless you wish to drive me mad."

"But why? You have always liked him too."

"It is false! I have always *hated* him!" cried Catherine. "And I hate him still. But *you* sha'n't marry him! You *cannot*! He has nothing—you have nothing! You shall never marry him—never—never!"

This time Bridget did not answer. A light seemed to dawn upon her. She looked at her sister in dumb amazement and terror; then with a cry she covered her face and sank to the ground.

"Oh, Catherine," she cried, "forgive me, dear; forgive me! I did not understand, but I see now how blind I have been. *You*—you care for him?"

"And if I do?" returned Catherine, bitterly. "Have I no right even to do that? Am I so coarse and common that I'm only the dust beneath his feet? You're a dainty lady, and I am only the drudge, the breadwinner; but if your skin is white, and men think you pretty, it's because *I'm* tanned with the sun and coarsened with wind and rain. If your hands are soft it's because mine are red with hard work, and *now* if I am despised and thought common it's



because I've given all my life and all my youth to make you what you are !"

"Oh, Catherine, I know that !" sobbed Bridget. "Do you think I can ever forget it—my sister ?"

"I am *not* your sister !" cried Catherine, fiercely. "Henceforth I am nothing to you ! Do you hear ? nothing ! Our lives have been together, but from to-night they part. You can go your way, I will go mine. Yes, go after your lover. Take the way he took—leave my house ! Go before you make me worse than I am—go, or——"

In her frenzy of passion she raised her hand as if to strike her sister. Bridget uttered a scream ; as she did so a man who had been standing unobserved in the doorway interposed between the two. It was Geoffrey Doone.

Bridget clung to him in terror.

"Softly, Catherine, softly," he said gently. "You frighten the little one."

"Stand aside, Geoffrey," said Catherine. "Don't *you* come between us."

"Catherine !" sobbed Bridget, "my own Catherine !"

"Out of my sight," cried Catherine fiercely. "For

I hate you! Yes, I hate you—I hate *him*—I hate everything in the world!"

"Catherine," cried Geoffrey, "you are mad!"

"And if I am, what's that to *you*? I tell you, I am done with all of you—yes, done with you for ever."

"Don't be so cruel!" cried Bridget. "Don't speak so harshly to me! You know I never meant to harm you, and you will forgive me!"

"Never, never, never! You have poisoned my life, and hardened my heart. There's nothing left now but hatred—yes, hatred, and most of all for *you*. Go, and never come back to me! Go, and never let me see your face again!"

"Come, Bridget," said Geoffrey, quietly. "We will leave her to herself."

Still sobbing and clinging to him piteously, Bridget allowed herself to be led from the room, and Catherine was once more alone.

All that night Geoffrey Doone sat in the great kitchen with his eyes fixed sadly upon the stairs leading up to Catherine's room. He sat perfectly still, always listening. For hours she paced the room above. Then there was silence.

Geoffrey approached the stairs and listened intently. He heard sounds of wild sobbing.

126 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

"Thank God !" he murmured ; then he stretched himself in the great ingle, leaning his head back against the wall, and slept.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SISTERS.

Grind, grind, Wheel o' the Mill !

Hard is the stone above, the stone below.

Between them slips the grain, while swift and still

O'erhead the great fans go !

Hard as the millstone is my heart; in pain

I watch the winnowing of the weary grain,

And weep in woe !—*The Mill-Song.*

NIGHT fell upon the farm and the surrounding country, its mellow darkness tempered by passing gleams of starlight, and now and then lit almost to rivalry with day by the beams of a full summer moon, drifting and shining between fleecy clouds.

Bridget sat alone in her room, still dressed. The window was open, and she watched the square space upon the floor, on which the moonlight fell, with that dull, mechanical interest in trifles which follows a heavy mental shock, awaiting for its reillumination whenever a passing cloud darkened it, and tracing its progress nearer and nearer to her feet as the leaden-footed moments crawled by.

She had wept till she seemed to have no more tears to shed, her eyes and brain were burning, her heart was as lead in her bosom, and her breath was as tremulous as the sea the day after a storm.

Catherine's fiery words rang in her ears with an iteration which had long since robbed them of meaning. Once or twice she caught herself repeating the phrases in a sobbing undertone. Her suffering was as that of an animal, dumb, indefinite, piteous; she had lost the power of centralising it, of dwelling on any one of its causes.

That Catherine should have spoken such words—that George should be as unhappy as herself—that the beautiful dream of an hour or so ago should be so suddenly broken—it was all like a hideous nightmare, without even the conviction of reality which nightmare brings with it. It was all real, she knew; but it did not feel real—her benumbed mind could not grasp or believe it. She asked herself again and again, could she be wandering in her mind? Once, impelled by an irresistible impulse, she went to the bedside and looked at the vacant pillow with a dull expectation of seeing her real self lying there asleep.

"I must be mad!" she said to herself, and, in a momentary pang of torture at the thought, called out

to God to spare her reason ; and, almost in the act, fell back into her stunned condition.

To this succeeded Nature's anodyne, and, unawares, Bridget fell into such a sleep as one might fancy blots out the being of the condemned criminal on his last night of life—a heavy, dreamless lapse of unconsciousness.

She awoke to find the moonlight on her face, and to see the great mellow orb of night hanging like a mild lamp in the square of deep blue heavens visible through the window of the chamber. For a mere second her senses were full of the refreshment of sleep, and then, with a sudden awful heart pang, her grief fell back on her, and she sprang to her feet, hiding her face in her hands with a stifled scream.

Slumber had renewed her tired senses only to renew the bitterness of memory ; the dream-atmosphere which had dwelt about the events of the preceding day was gone, each fact and word stood out, sharp edged and distinct. Her tears began to rain anew, her body writhed as in an actual physical torture.

"Catherine ! Catherine ! Catherine !" she wailed between her sobs, in a tone of such bitter entreaty

as she might have used to stay a blow from her sister's hand.

Then, in a sudden fever of resolve to end the strife which to her young and tender heart was a profane, almost blasphemous reversal of the law of nature, she crept from the room and stole like a ghost through the darkened corridor to the door of Catherine's chamber. Her hand fell in the darkness on its cold, smooth surface, which seemed to chide her.

"Catherine!" she cried again, with a choking sob.

The sound seemed very loud in the dead stillness of the house, though in reality it was hardly louder than a whisper.

She slid to her knees to await the answer.

None came, and she leaned against the door, with cheek and hands touching it. For a moment her own agony was gone, she thought only of the dear sister lying so near to her, alone and unhappy, and she longed with an intense desire to feel Catherine in her arms, to soothe her sorrow, to renounce George even, if only their old sweet and unbroken affection could be restored.

"Catherine, I'll give him up!" she moaned, in the same strangled voice, and still no answer came.

"Oh! my darling, speak to me! Let me see your dear face again! Tell me you don't hate me any more, tell me you didn't mean those dreadful words you spoke last night!"

Silence still reigned within the room, a silence which crushed her heart like lead, and rang in her ears like the beat of a distant tide. Then she became aware of a thin spot of light upon the opposite wall, and traced it to the keyhole of the door. She peeped through, but could see nothing, though the light somehow seemed friendly and encouraged her to stay. Presently she heard a stir within the room, a rustling movement followed by a heavy sigh. She held her breath till it broke from her in a sob. A chair grated on the floor, the thin spear of light vanished and reappeared.

"Catherine!" she cried, with her lips to the keyhole, "Oh, Catherine!"

Her sister's voice sounded on the stillness, two words which fell on her brain like clods upon a coffin-lid.

"Go away!"

She cried her name again, with a tone of agonised entreaty, and the same hollow sounds answered it.



"You are killing me! I shall die if you are so cruel! Oh, how could you, how could you! Catherine, please! Oh, listen to me! It's Bridget, your own Bridget, your own little sister calling to you."

"Go away!"

The voice sounded fateful in its hollow, monotonous repetition of the words, and the poor child obeyed, creeping back to her room with slow steps and smothered sobs which shook her whole body like heavy blows. She threw herself upon her bed, and the tears flowed freely.

Her healthy young nature began to assert itself after a while. Her lifelong submission to Catherine as the elder and superior, whose word was law, whose smile was sunshine, and whose anger was the one thing she had dreaded in all her innocent life, was not proof against the natural reaction of her individuality.

"Is it my fault that George loves me?" she asked. "What harm have I done to Catherine in loving him?"

The thought steeled her against her sister's angry injustice, though only for a little while. The habits of a life are not broken in a minute, and the thought of having to face Catherine in the morning, and for

many mornings yet to come, reawakened her distress.

She lay with closed eyes, trying to realise the life before her, a life devoid of Catherine's constant affection and all its evidences.

The effort to conjure up the future cast her naturally back upon the past, and as she remembered detail after detail of her life with Catherine she began to feel guilty and selfish. How good Catherine had been, how tender and gentle! with what a wealth of affection she had watched and tended her! There were moments when she almost hated George for coming between them, though a second later she was crying her lover's name and pathetically beseeching him to protect her, to take her away and shield her from her sister's anger.

When she opened her eyes the room was full of the soft, diffused light of early morning, and the sky was blushing faintly in prophecy of the advent of the sun.

She went to the window and leaned out, bathing her face in the fresh breeze, and pressing the leaves of the trailing rose-vine, wet with dew, against her aching forehead and hot cheeks. The mists were rising from the distant hills, and a faint wind stirred

the flowers of the garden and carried their fresh cool odour to her nostrils.

Presently she became aware of a dim figure hovering beyond the confines of the garden, and before her eyes had assured her of its identity, her heart cried out to her that it was George.

She shrank back into the darkness of the room and watched.

Yes, it was George, and, as the light broadened, she could make out his face quite clearly. It was pale, and there was a mingling of pain and exultation upon it as he looked towards her window. She longed to give him some sign of her presence, but was withheld by some nameless mingling of emotions, and she watched him as he moved slowly and reluctantly out of sight.

It was broad daylight by this time, and the farm was beginning to wake to its daily round of life. The poultry-yard had been astir for two hours past, and now an occasional strident low came from the cow-shed. She heard the shutters of the kitchen window clank against the wall below, and a clatter of crockery came through the open window. A yawning farm-servant began to sweep the yard, and soon after Amanda, with her print gown tucked

up about her calves, passed with a milking-stool.

The time was approaching when Bridget must meet Catherine again, and she trembled at the thought.

A glance at the mirror revealed her face, all pale and tear-stained, her hair dishevelled. She repaired the ravages of her night of tears, and as she did so her eyes fell upon her dress, a pretty robe of muslin, decorated with pink ribbons. She had been proud of it yesterday, but now it struck her with a pang of shame as she remembered Catherine's plain garb of cotton. She slipped it off, and in its stead assumed a rough serge dress she was accustomed to wear when it took her wayward fancy to join in the work of the farm. Her hands, soft and white, embarrassed her—they were so different from Catherine's, but she could not change them as she had changed her dress.

She awaited Amanda's knock at her door with gaining tremours, but when it came, took her courage *à deux mains*, and descended to the parlor. Catherine was there, and received her with frozen silence. Her face was hard, and as she and Bridget made a mockery of breakfast she did not once glance at the timid figure sitting opposite to her. The meal finished, Catherine rose, and was passing from the

room, when Bridget sprang from her chair and ran to her.

"Don't touch me!" cried Catherine, shrinking back.

But Bridget, the tears running down her cheeks, clasped her close.

"Oh! Catherine, Catherine," she cried, between her heart-broken sobs, "won't you speak to me?"

Catherine's figure trembled and stiffened suddenly, she unwound the arms which clung about her, not violently, but with a calm determination more terrible than violence would have been. She held Bridget's wrist for a moment, looking at her with a hard, set face.

"I *hate* you!" she said; then, with a deadly calm, and releasing her hold, she walked from the room.



' CATHERINE ! CATHERINE ! CATHERINE ! ' SHE WAILED BETWEEN HER SOBS. — Page 136.



## CHAPTER XI.

### FATHER AND SON.

Which are you wooing, my son, my son ?  
The brown maid or the white ?  
The brown has gold, but the white has none,  
Take heed your choice be right !  
For if you choose the penniless thing,  
Foul shall your fortune be !  
I'll dower ye both with a hempen string,  
To hang both her and thee.—*The Miller's Thumb.*

MEANWHILE, George Kingsley, after lingering miserably about the place in hopes of catching a glimpse of Bridget, until he dared linger no longer, reluctantly walked home to the Warren Farm.

He picked his way through the familiar weeds of the yard, entered the door, hung his hat on a rough iron rail driven into the panelling for that purpose, and found himself in the dingy room in which he and his father took their meals together. The old man was bending, pen in hand, over a battered table set in the light of the window, and either was, or feigned



to be, too deeply engaged in perusing the papers littered before him to turn or look up at the sound of his son's footstep on the uncarpeted floor.

"Fifteen thousand seven hundred and fifty-six seventeen and ninepence ha' penny i' the funds," the old man muttered relishingly. "Eighteen hundred out on loan at good interest. Farm and plant. I ain't took stock of 'em lately—say another five thousand, and it's more than that. If that young vule knew what he was jeopardisin' "—

George moved, and the Gaffer turned at the sound, with a grunt of alarm, clutching the papers in a disorderly armful.

"What d'ye want, *you?*" he panted at the dim figure, with a scowl. "Oh, 'tis 'ee, Jarge! What a fright 'ee give me, *to* be sure. You're late."

"I've been for a walk," answered George, moodily, sitting at the other table, littered with the remnants of the old man's breakfast, a few scraps of rusty bacon-rind, and an empty tin can which had contained buttermilk.

"Eat your victuals, lad," said the Gaffer, turning the papers into a drawer and transferring the key to his pocket. "I've got summat to say to 'ee."

"I don't want any, thank you," answered George.

"So much saved is so much gained," said the affectionate parent. "Jarge, lad," he went on, with as near an approach to a caressing, wheedling manner as his vulpine features and harsh voice would admit of, "don't 'ee be a vule, now don't 'ee! Listen to reason. I've been takin' count o' things. Catherine Thorpe's come into money—a lump o' money. Ten thousand pounds! It's enough t' make a God-fearin' man turn atheist to see the luck o' some folks. Ten thousand pounds for a bottle of elderberry wine, and it's took me fifty years saving an' scraping, down early and up late, to make the double of it. And I be a twenty thousander. It's all yourn, Jarge, in the course o' nature, if so be as you've got the sense to take it. The lass is as fond o' you as a cow is of her calf. I've sounded her, and I *know*."

George made a movement of impatience.

"Now, now!" said the old man, wheedlingly, "listen, Jarge, listen! I be middling tough, and perhaps you thinks I be going to last for ever. All the Kingsleys *is* long lived," he added apologetically, "it's in the breed. Jarge, I've been thinkin'!"

(His little red eyes twinkled with the very concupiscence of gain, and he stammered with eagerness, his tone changing from its wheedling note to a

threatening one and back again.) "Don't be a vule. Don't throw thirty thousand pound into the gutter. Ye won't ha' so *very* long to wait for my brass. Twenty years—fifteen, may be—ten, perhaps, 'll see me under the sod!" He peered eagerly into his son's face to mark the effect of this pleasing prophecy. "And the wench's money 'll be yourn, right away, when ye marry her. Ye'll leave the church door with ten thousand pound, not to speak o' the farm, as 'd be a good property with a man to look after it. Damn 'ee!" he cried, his anger at the young man's obstinate perversity breaking to the surface in spite of his endeavours to repress it, "what is it as ye wants? *My* money? Not while I be livin', my lad!"

"But I'll tell 'ee what I'll do," he added, falling back into the coaxing tone. He mopped his forehead and gasped, greed tugging at his very heart-strings. "I'll sign a deed of partnership—me to keep what I've got, and you to share and share alike wi' me in the vuture, and to have all when I die. Will *that* suit 'ee? Will that suit 'ee, Jarge?"

"Can't you understand, father," said George, with a weary impatience, "that it is quite useless for you to talk to me about money in this matter! My mind is made up. I'll marry Bridget if she'll have me,

tho' we haven't more to begin the world with than the clothes we stand in at the altar."

"Ye can't do it, Jarge," wailed the old man. "It's agin nature. Ye *can't* do it! What! Ye *will*!" he half screamed, as his son rose and walked towards the door. "Don't ye provoke me to curse 'ee. I be your father, and the curse'll stick to 'ee."

Rage and cupidity so inspired him that he stood straight, looking more than his real height in the full glow of paternal piety and virtue.

"Father!" cried George, turning on him in an anger which for the moment was as hot as the old man's own. "A pretty father you've been to me truly!"

"But I *be* your father!" cried the old savage, standing on the vantage ground of his paternity.

"Then, father," said George, growing cool as suddenly as he had become heated, "give me my due and let me go."

"Your due!" screamed the Gaffer. "Ay, that I will. May God"——

"No!" interrupted George, with a mockery which tasted bitter in his own mouth, "I don't mean that. I mean the portion that falleth unto me. My mother left me a hundred pounds a year ten years ago."

The Gaffer dropped from the patriarchal to the finan-

cial with a suddenness which might have seemed more than a little ludicrous to a third person, had any been present.

"And what about your keep, and your clothes, ye hulkin' good-for-naught?" he asked indignantly.

"Take what they cost you," said George, "and give me the rest. I'm going to London, and then I'm going to marry Bridget."

"Damn her, the whey-faced slut!" cried the Gaffer.

"Stop!" cried George. "Say what you will of me, but you sha'n't abuse her."

The old man broke into a torrent of interjections, and spat insults and curses on the name of his son's sweetheart. George left the room, fearful lest his anger should make him forget himself. The unvenerable old man was his father, and violence to him was impossible. The Gaffer followed him to the yard, heaping curse on curse.

"Go and rot! You're no son of mine!" he screamed hoarsely, as George's figure disappeared into the roadway. He stood at his threshold, mumbling insult and anathema between his toothless gums for five minutes after. More even than his son he hated the innocent girl who was the cause of their quarrel, and vowed revenge against her. What form that



"GO AND ROT! YOU'RE NO SON OF MINE!" HE SCREAMED  
HOARSELY.—Page 142.



revenge could take was not clear to him, but so good a hater would find a way.

George went towards the farm, his heart at first full of rage against the harsh and sordid old man, whose parting curses still rang in his ears. It was hardly his fault that he had never had much affection for his father, who neither gave nor demanded it. What education, what half-seen glimpses he had of the large world outside the mean little circle in which Gaffer Kingsley was content to pass his life, and to which he would have condemned his son, the boy owed entirely to his mother. He would have been employed in scaring crows or cutting turnips instead of at school, if the old man could have had his way; but the mother, yielding in all else, had been resolute in that, and had insisted on spending some portion of her patrimony in educating her son. Luckily for George, she had lived to save him from his father's sordid tyranny until he had stood on the verge of early manhood, and he had never lost the advantages thus gained. The Gaffer, while openly and noiselessly contemning his "book-larning" and "finicking pursuits," had grown to have a sort of sullen respect for them, for there is nothing a man of his sort fears as superior knowledge.



George dismissed his angry thoughts of his father as he walked on, and turned his eyes to the future.

"We must face the world together," he said cheerily. "The little girl won't fail me, God bless her! She's a brave little woman. I've a hundred a year, a pair of hands, and a head on my shoulders, not quite empty, thank God and the dear old mother! Things aren't so bad after all. I must persuade Bridget to marry me at once. What's the use of keeping apart now we know each other's minds? . . . By Jove, there she is! Hi! Bridget! Bridget, my darling! Why, she's running away from me!"

He had caught sight of his sweetheart's slight figure in the field, a hundred yards away from the road, walking slowly with bent head. At the sound of his voice her pace had quickened. With an unformed fear in his mind, he leaped through a gap in the hedge and ran in pursuit of her.

"Bridget, it's I. It's George. Won't you stop and speak to me? Why, you're crying!" he said, as he came level with her. "What is it, dear?"

He took her by the waist, and tried to draw her hands from her face. but she resisted, and swung from his grasp.

"Bridget! Are you offended with me? What have I done? Speak, dear. Tell me what troubles you."

She was sobbing as if her heart would break, and, as he enfolded her again, dropped her head upon his shoulder, and so stood, with her arms about his neck.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked again, bewildered by these signs of sorrow. "What has happened?"

"Oh, George," she managed to get out at last, "you must go away; you must never try to see me again."

"Not try to see you!" echoed George, with a laugh and a caress. "You little goose, what silliness have you got into your pretty head?"

"You must go, George. You mustn't love me any more. You mustn't *think* of me. Oh! don't laugh," she cried. "I mean it. Indeed, I mean it. No, please don't kiss me! Go away, leave me!"

"Come, come," said her lover, "if I am to go away and leave you, at least I have the right to ask why?"

At that her tears and sobs redoubled.

"Oh! I can't tell you. It's too dreadful. I've been crying about it all night, till I must be a perfect fright."

"You're what you always were—the prettiest girl in England," said George, drawing the tear-stained face to his cheek. "Come, dear, tell me the trouble. It must be very bad if *I* can't save you from it," he added, with a fond and tender boastfulness. "Come, what is it?"

Caresses and entreaties were of no avail for a time, but at last Bridget sobbed out :

"It's Catherine !"

"Well," said George, "what about Catherine?"

"She knows," sobbed Bridget, "that you l-l-love me."

"She would be very blind if she didn't," answered George. "But what if she does?"

"Oh, it's you who are blind," said Bridget. "She—oh, how can I tell you? She loves *you* !"

George nodded. The old man's assertion was true then, and no mere vulgar ruse to turn his thoughts in the direction of Catherine's money.

"She told me last night," continued Bridget, with a fresh outburst of tears and sobs, "and she said—she said"—

"What did she say?" asked George.

"She said she hated me! She said I had stolen your love from her, that I had come between you. It

isn't true, George, say it isn't true. You loved me first and always, didn't you?"

"Of course I did, my darling," said George, drawing her closer.

"Oh! but you mustn't," cried Bridget. "You mustn't love me. You must go away, and not part Catherine and me. What shall I do if I lose her? She has been everything to me—elder sister. She has been so good, and she loved me so. And now"——

Tears choked her utterance.

"Listen, Bridget," said George, gravely. "I knew something of this. I learned it from my father yesterday. You know him, and how fond he is of money. He found out that Catherine cared for me; he told her that I loved her. He is driving me away from home because I won't give you up. I am going to London to make a living for you, to make a home to take my darling little wife to."

"I can never be your wife, George—I cannot give up Catherine's love, even for yours."

Bridget spoke steadily, without even a quaver in her voice to show how much the words cost her.

"My love and duty must be hers," she added.

"Try and look at things sensibly, dear," George

urged. "It is better that one should be unhappy than three. I could never marry Catherine, whatever happened. I can never marry anybody but you. Catherine is a sensible girl, and will come to understand before long. She is only unreasonable in being angry with you—it is my father who has made all this unhappiness. He had no right to try to pledge me to your sister. Give her time to think it over, and she will see things as they really are."

Bridget shook her head.

"You don't know Catherine as I do," she said despairingly. "She hates me. She said so. She said dreadful things last night. No, George," she went on, as he made a motion to take her in his arms again: "That is all over. I can never be your wife. I should bring you nothing but ill fortune, and I could never be happy for thinking of Catherine. We must part, George."

She stopped her ears with her hands as he attempted to speak, and, with a bursting sob, ran from him. He stood looking after her, dazed and bewildered by this sudden wreckage of his hopes. He felt numbed and stupefied, and remained where he was, looking at the spot at which Bridget's figure had disappeared, long after she was out of sight.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SHEEPFOLD.

Touched by the flying cloud's dark skirt of rain,  
The Sheepfold lay upon the lonely height—  
And, murmuring ever like a thing in pain,  
Troubled with low monotonous refrain  
The peace of day, the silence of the night.

—*Songs of the Weald.*

HIGH up on the Weald, overlooking the farm, the village, and the farther country, and even, on fine days, catching a glimpse of the far distant grey of the sea flecked with an occasional sail, old Jasper the shepherd lived in silent communion with earth and sky. Sixty years of his long span of life had been spent there, and for the most part in solitude, for the thin track, mainly worn by his own feet, from the sheepfold to the foot of the rising ground on which it stood led nowhere but to the sheepfold, and in inclement weather the old man often passed a full week without beholding a human face or hearing a human voice.

Long use had made this almost complete solitude

not only endurable, but necessary to him : and when, as sometimes happened, his needs drew him to the village, he lingered there as short a time as needs be, and returned with all possible speed to his lonely "hut on wheels."

Without bearing much resemblance to the disagreeable human "variety" known as a cynic, he had but a poor opinion of human nature, and greatly preferred the society of the beasts he tended to that of his fellow-creatures. They neither drank nor quarrelled nor fought, nor spoke evil one against the other, but lived their lives in a dumb contentment hardly deeper than his own, and with as little thought of what the morrow might bring.

Densely ignorant of nearly all the world calls "Knowledge," unable to read even the simplest sentence, he had accumulated, in his long life of solitary musing and observation, an amount of odd lore which had made him a proverb for miles round. Not even the learned Culpeper could have taught him anything regarding the natures and properties of the herbs and plants which grew upon the Weald, huge bundles of which piled in the corners of his hut, and suspended from its rude rafters scented the air with their arid aromas. He could decipher as keenly as the oldest sailor the meaning of every flow of wind

and every film of cloud, and could tell the hour and minute of the day with unfailing accuracy so long as sun or star was visible.

Rather, it would seem, seeing the extreme solitariness of his life, by intuition than by experience, he had a keen eye for human character, and the few visitors to the Weald who exchanged words with him never failed to carry with them some quaint retort or scrap of dry philosophy. His solitude had bred no shyness in him, and he would have spoken his mind to a king with the same philosophic indifference as marked his intercourse with the peasants who came to him for herbs and charms. Nothing of a money lover, he was a keen hand at a bargain, and there was a vague idea among his neighbours that old Jasper had a fairish sum hidden away in a corner of his hut, or buried in some spot on the Weald. When, as sometimes happens, he was chaffed about this secret hoard, he neither encouraged the notion nor denied it.

"I've got enough to lay me under the sod decent, and ne'er trouble the parish. In the bank? No, no! Banks bust, and then where are ye? Him as can find *my* money's welcome to it, if ye think it'll pay ye for the s'arching."

Banks, it was pointed out to him, gave interest.

"Interest! What's the use of interest, when ye



don't know from day to day whether the principal's safe? What's the use o' interest to *me*, with ne'er a chick nor child to come after me? I leave interest to Gaffer Kingsley and his like, as has got nothing better to think about. Money's like fire—a good servant, but a powerful bad master. It's a curse oftener than a blessing. What's the good on it after you've got *enough*, as is soon got. Ye can't smoke more than one pipe at a time, nor drink more than one mug o' beer, can ye, or live in more than one house? When you've got your belly full, what more can Queen Victoria have? Them's the notions as comes from living in towns and cities, where a parcel o' vules spends their lives, among bricks and mortar, raking in the muck o' the gutters for money. Look at the sheep, a deal wiser than most Christians. When they've had enough they lie down and wait till they're hungry again."

It was the night after the haymaking feast and dance. Jasper had penned the sheep within the fold, and, with his dog between his knees, was smoking a contemplative pipe before turning in, and scanning the sky through half-closed eyes.

"There 'll be a storm afore morning," he said to himself. "It 's blowing up from the sea, and them ragged bits o' cloud mean a power o' rain."





“HOHO! SHEPHERD! HOHO!”—Page 153.

The dog pricked his ears and gave a warning growl.

"Quiet, Speed," said Jasper. "What's coming, lad?"

A shrill, warning voice, as of one who had drunken not wisely but too well, was heard ascending the slope—

"It was a little maid, and a pretty little maid,  
And a merry little maid was she ;  
And I says, 'My little maid, and my pretty little maid,  
Will you come through the woods with me !' "

"Hold up, man !" cried another deeper voice.

"It's that vule Marsh," said Jasper, "and there's Doctor Dutton with him."

Marsh broke into song again.

"But the pretty little maid was a wicked little maid,  
And she "——

"Hoho ! Shepherd ! *Hoho !* "

Mr. Marsh, considerably the worse for liquor, surmounted the final knoll with the aid of Dutton, who, being perfectly sober, was severely reprimanded by his companion for the unsteadiness of his gait.

"Stand straight, Doctor ! or the Shepherd will think you've been drinking. Yes, Shepherd," he continued, shaking a doleful head at Jasper, "it's

me—or, at least, it's all that is left of the gayest man in the parish. Oh, Marsh! Marsh!" he continued in a maudlin self-pity, "'tis the rates and taxes has done it again. It's hard to be pleasing to the women, and to be defeated allays by prejudice of occupation."

"What's he talking about?" asked Jasper.

"Why," said Dutton, "he was a-settin' his new beaver at the mistress—in good company, too, for *I* was hankering that way—when that young sprig from The Warren come in and won the prize."

"What? Master Jarge?" asked the Shepherd. "Well, ye don't surprise me, though it seems to have surprised *him*," with a nod at Marsh. "I've seen it comin' for months past."

"There's no accounting for the ways of women, from Eve downwards," said the lovelorn collector of taxes. "With *me* in the market—*me*—she passes on to that young whipper-snapper!"

"And you passed on to ale and sperrits, Mr. Marsh," said Jasper, chuckling. "And mighty little comfort ye seem to ha' found in 'em. Where be ye a-going so late?"

"Across the Weald to Wyscomb, where I've a sick call," said Dutton. "This hod-me-dod clung to me, and wouldn't leave me."

"Brothers in misfortune," cried Marsh, with drunken affection; "partners in misery! Leave you—never! Shepherd, you can read the future. Can you tell me what's to come of all this?"

"To come o' it?" repeated Jasper, drily. "A vine headache i' the morning!"

"Here's somebody with a lantern!" said Marsh, looking fixedly in front of him and swaying on Dutton's arm.

"Lantern be d—d," said Dutton. "It's the moon rising, you idiot!"

"Is it the moon?" asked Marsh, with feebly elevated eye-brows. "No," he said emphatically; "no, it isn't the moon. It's a-dancing up and down!"

"Look here," said Dutton, "I've had enough of you. You'd best go home."

"Never," said Marsh, clinging to him tighter than before. "I'll never leave you. We're companions in misery. Let's have another drink. We'll drown the little Coopid in the bowl. Goo' night, Shepherd, Go' bless ye! 'For it was a little maid.' *Do try and walk straight, Doctor.*"

With a soundless laugh from behind his short pipe, Jasper watched the little man stagger away.

"No fool like an old fool," he said. "Oh! the vanity o' them poor human creatures!"

He rose, and, with the faithful dog at his heels, moved towards his hut, when another figure rose from the lower ground, and he recognized Geoffrey Doone.

"Why, Measter Geoffrey," he said, "whither away at this time o' night?"

"I was taking a ramble," said Geoffrey, "and I heard voices. Who were they?"

"That silly creature Marsh, the tax-collector, and Dutton, the vet. They brought me news from the farm."

Geoffrey made no answer, but moved on silently beside him.

"One man takes trouble one way, and one another," said Jasper. "Cheer up, Measter Geoffrey, cheer up! We've all been through it one time or another. I had my fancy once. I said I'd die when she threw me over. But I didn't. I'm hale and hearty yet, though it's more than two-score years bygone, and the daisies have been o'er her this many a day, poor wench! It's no discredit to a man, for the daft creatures couldn't tell ye why they take one and not another. *She's* a bit sensibler than most of 'em, I used to think, but"—

"You're on the wrong tack, Jasper," said Geoffrey. "Those fellows have misled you, as they've been

misled by the Gaffer themselves. Miss Catherine is not going to marry George Kingsley. It's Miss Bridget he's after, and a pretty kettle of fish it is, altogether. The two sisters have quarrelled—at least Miss Catherine did her best to make a quarrel of it, but it was all on one side. She was unjust, unreasonable."

"Ay," said the philosopher of the Weald. "Woman like. Their heads can't hold more than one notion at a time. But now you've got your chance, Measter Geoffrey. Go in and win."

"My chance?" asked Geoffrey.

"Ay, surely," said Jasper. "There no such time for coortin' maid or widow than just when they've been disappi'nted of another sweetheart. If she'd ha' been the sensible wench I took her for, you'd ha' churched her long ago. You'll have her yet, if you've got the spunk to try. Who should she turn to for comfort but to the man as has stood by her all these years, as has seen her through such a mort o' trouble. Up and at her, lad! Up and at her!"

Geoffrey shook his head.

"Catherine isn't that sort of woman, Shepherd. I daresay it's true of most of 'em, but not of her. She loves the lad. Think how much she must love him to turn on Miss Bridget like that, and say the things



she said ! She, who ne'er had a bad word for a dog. There's a kind of flirting, vulgar woman, that could be persuaded to marry any one; just to show another man she *could* do it, to spite him ; but Catherine Thorpe isn't that sort."

" Pretty much of a muchness I've found 'em," said the old misogynist. " There's differences, o' course, just as there is in sheep. They're white and black, big-horned and small, short-faced and long ; but they're sheep, when all's said and done. And women is women ! "

Geoffrey shook his head again.

" I'll go to the hut, Shepherd, and take a bunch of your dandywort, and make my walk some use. Pincher's been off his feed a bit lately. Are the lambs coming along well ? "

" A decent year we've had," said Jasper. " But many losses."

They walked to the hut together, where Jasper sought and found the herb Geoffrey had asked for.

" Will ye stay and take a bite, Measter Geoffrey ? " he asked hospitably. " Ye've a longish walk afore ye. It's but plain food, but ye're kindly welcome."

" Nothing, thank you," said Geoffrey. " Good-night."

Jasper answered his farewell greeting, and stood

***"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 159**

looking after him as he went over the brow of the Weald, a dark figure against the tender blue of the moonlight-flooded sky.

"He takes it bitter hard!" said the old man.  
"Eh, what a pile o' trouble it brings on folk, living among human creatures!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### MISCHIEF BREWING.

Foul was the place where it grew,  
Foul was its blossom and breath,  
Chilly and foul as the dew  
Wiped from lips parted in death!—*The Philire.*

It was something of a surprise to Gaffer Kingsley, returning home after his usual morning walk about the Warren Farm, to find George sitting in the parlour. He had quite supposed that when the boy had marched out of the house, followed by maledictions, that it was his farewell, at least for a time.

"Thought better of it, you?" was the Gaffer's jeering query, as he threw his hat on the disorderly table and sat down to his midday meal.

George made no answer, and did not even return the look the old man bent upon him from under his foxy brows.

"If you be o' the same mind still," said the Gaffer, "I give 'ee straight warnin' as you don't stay *here*. Them as lives under my roof 'beys my authority, see?"

I'll have no lazybone vagabonds coortin' no beggarly sluts from my premises, so make your mind up, and do it quick."

George rose and left the room, and the old man, having bolted a few mouthfuls of food and swallowed a can of butter-milk, leaned back in his chair and communed with himself in angry mutterings.

"I'll have it out wi' *him*, anyhow," he said to himself, and, rising, walked upstairs to George's room.

"Make your ch'ice, Jarge," he said. "Which is it to be? Will 'ee have the money, and the varm, and a likely lass for a wife, or will 'ee go out o' this and starve? Make your ch'ice."

"My choice is made, father," said George, quietly. "You won't be troubled with me much longer."

"No," growled the Gaffer, "that I won't, ye may take your oath o' that. Do as you're bid, or out of this house you go, neck and crop."

"I shall leave this house as soon as I'm ready," said his son.

He meant to stay and make a final appeal to Bridget, and he had but little doubt of the effect that appeal would have. The poor child had been distraught that morning. She would come to see the situation with clearer eyes, and her affection for him

would triumph over her fear of her sister's anger. Catherine, too, would repent of her harshness ; it was not in her nature to go on hating so affectionate and inoffensive a creature as Bridget.

"Ready?" echoed the Gaffer. "Ready to leave? D—n your impudence! See, you! Gi'e me your word as ye'll marry Catherine Thorpe, or pack your duds and march!"

"Then pay me that money you owe me," answered George. "It's all one to me whether I stay here or go to the Ring o' Bells."

At this the Gaffer foamed at the mouth, and lifted his staff to strike. The calm, unthreatening eye with which George watched the gesture made him lower it.

"Please understand," said George, "that I mean to have my due. The money is mine. There are ten years to be paid. You can take fifty pounds a year as the price of my living here. That leaves five hundred pounds. Give me the cash and I'll go at once."

The Gaffer stammered, incoherent with rage, and ended the interview, which had taken so unpromising a turn, by leaving the room.

Now, Gaffer Kingsley's character has been handled

with exceptionally small skill if it has not become abundantly plain to the reader that he was purely and simply a monomaniac. A natively grasping and miserly temperament, exaggerated by years of indulgence, had ended in a literal inability to care for, or, indeed, to see anything in the world but money. He loved money with an intensity for which it is not easy to find a parallel. No religious devotee could make of his God, no passionate lover of his mistress, so complete and all absorbing an idol as pounds, shillings, and pence had become to the old miser. When a passion has once reached such proportions, its results may at any moment become tragic, and the person who crosses or thwarts it has need of the protection of his guardian Angel.

The mere suspicion that George loved Bridget had awakened in the Gaffer's mind a hatred such as most men would find it difficult to conceive. When after Catherine's accession to fortune George still persisted in his choice, the hatred, great and venomous as it had been, deepened. And now George's insane infatuation was merely causing him to pursue a penniless girl, not merely impelling him to throw away hundreds of broad acres and ten thousand pounds of solid money, but was going to cost *him*, George's

father, five hundred pounds in cash ! Words are weak to describe the paroxysms of senile wrath into which the old man was thrown by that prospect. Had Bridget stood before him he would have killed her with his hands.

A little after sunset that evening, as Jasper the shepherd was wending his way to his hut, he beheld the figure of the Gaffer painfully covering, with much hard breathing and many stoppages, the last of the little knolls which lay between the hut and the upper fields. It was the first time the old man had paid him the honour of a personal visit for some years ; so, leaning on his crook, Jasper awaited with some curiosity the explanation of his appearance.

"Eh !" said the Gaffer, wiping a perspiring forehead with the sleeve of his coat, "'tis a moundy hard climb to get to 'ee, Shepherd. Ye allays said ye warn't fond o' company, and I should think you gets little enough of it hereaway."

"More than I wants sometimes," said the Shepherd, with a sour look at his visitor. "What brings you here so late?"

"Gi'e me time, and I'll come to it," answered the Gaffer, sitting on a grass-covered mound. He slowly panted his wind back, but seemed in no hurry to

approach the object of his visit. The Shepherd, looking at him, saw that his coarse-grained skin was pallid under its tan and grime, and the hands which leant upon his staff were tremulous.

"I ain't the man I was, Shepherd. I'm getting old, and the hill it breathes me."

"Folk don't get younger at your time o' life," said the Shepherd, drily.

"Nor at thine, come to that," answered the Gaffer.

"Well," said Jasper, "I left my pot o' the hob, and once cooked is enough for my victuals. What can I do for 'ee?"

The Gaffer looked round with tremulous caution.

"There's nobody within hearin', Shepherd?"

"Dogs and sheep," replied the Shepherd. "Nowt else."

"Well, then, I want 'ee to help me, and I've come to ax 'ee to do it."

"I thought ye scorned my ways too much for that," said Jasper.

"Ye're known for a skilful man, Shepherd, far and near. The wenches come to thee for love-philtres, and the men know thy skill in yerbs."

He paused and looked round again. His lips



twitched oddly, and he kept glancing askant from Jasper's face to the surrounding country.

"Ye know that brindled mastiff bitch o' mine, the old beast you cured o' the mange?"

Jasper nodded. The Gaffer rubbed his bristly lips, swallowed, and went on,

"She be sickenin' of a bite she got from a dog up-town. She flies at folk, and I'm a bit afeared. Well, then, 'tis simple—I want to get rid of her to save trouble."

"Then shoot her," said Jasper. "That's easy enough, surely."

The Gaffer shook his head, looking up at Jasper with a curious cunning leer.

"Nay, I hate the look o' blood, and I don't want to torture the poor beast, for, though maybe ye wouldn't think it, I'm tender-earted, and hate the sight o' pain. So—I were thinking, ye're a skilful man, Shepherd, and know the qualities o' yerbs—I were thinkin' ye might gi'e me something for her to drink, something to kill her, without making a mess with her blood and without pain. Without pain," he repeated, darting a glance at Jasper's face and then letting his eyes wander indeterminately over the landscape.

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 167

"Little need to come to me for that," said Jasper. "Get some lucifer matches, take the phosphorus, and melt it down in milk."

"Ay, ay!" said the old man, "I understand. But now I'll tell 'ee." He looked round again with even greater caution than before, and leant nearer speaking almost in a whisper. "'Tain't my own dog, but a neighbour's as I want to p'ison. A great black brute, as comes to our fold at night, and worries the lambs. Say, you! doan't 'ee know some yerb that kills and leaves no trace? If the beast was opened they'd find the phosphorus stuff inside of him, and then I'd be pulled up, mayhap. See?"

"Ye want a p'ison that kills easy, and leaves no trace in the stomach of beast or human creature?" said Jasper.

The Gaffer started.

"I said nowt o' human creatures," he said angrily. "I told 'ee a dog, Shepherd."

"Dog or Christian, 'tis one matter for that," answered Jasper. "What's death to one is death to the other."

"Ay," said the old man. "Ay! ye say so, and ye're a skilful man. Ay, no doubt."

"But if I gave 'ee p'ison like that," said Jasper,

"it might get *me* into trouble. Ye might leave it lying about, and mischief might happen."

"Never fear," said the Gaffer, eagerly. "Never fear for that. I'll be main careful, trust me. Say, now, can ye find me the stuff I want?"

"I don't know as I couldn't," said Jasper; "that is, if I was well enough paid for the risk o' it."

"Of course, of course. That's reasonable enough."

He qualified this acquiescence, which on second thoughts appeared somewhat too ready.

"But how much, Shepherd? Ye knows I be a poor man."

"I know ye're made of brass," said Jasper. "Folks who come to me must pay, Gaffer. This job's worth—let me see!" He rubbed his forehead with an open palm, and watched the old man with a keen relish of his tremendous anxiety to hear the price, nothing of which was visible in his face, which was intently calculative. "It's worth two pounds."

"Two pound!" cried the Gaffer, with a drooping jaw.

"And cheap at the money," said Jasper, "if the beast robs 'ee of your lambs."

"Two pound!" repeated his companion. "Eh,

Shepherd, but two pound 's a mort o' money. Two pounds for a drop o' yerb stuff!"

"Two pound is my price," replied Jasper inflexibly.

"I'll tell 'ee what I'll do!" cried the old man. "I'll give 'ee twenty shillings! Good money!"

"Ye may keep it," answered Jasper, preparing to go. "Take my advice, and, if the dog's a poacher, lay in wait for him and shoot him. There's no law to punish a man for defending his own, and 'tis less dangerous than meddling with drugs you don't understand the workings o'."

"I want the stuff," said the Gaffer.

"Then pay for it," retorted the Shepherd.

"I'll give 'ee thirty shillings," said the old man, desperately.

"I'll take two pounds," answered Jasper, gaffing his fish after playing him; "and if you try to beat me down again you sha'n't have the stuff at all—not at no price."

"Well," said the Gaffer, dolorously, "two pound, then!"

"Cash down," said Jasper, holding out his hand for the money.

"D'ye think I be the Bank, ye vule!" asked the

old man snappishly, "to carry all that power o' money about wi' me, and get murdered of a night for my foolishness? My word 's my word. Give me the stuff and you shall have the two pound."

"Touch hands on it, Gaffer, and it's a bargain."

The old man gave him a tremulous and clammy hand, withdrawing it to wipe his forehead.

"Eh, ye're a hard-fisted old man, Shepherd."

"There's another thing, Gaffer," said Jasper. "Ye must swear to me to tell ne'er a soul where the stuff was gotten."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the old man. "Ye're safe in my hands?"

"And you be sure that 'tis only for the beast that kills the lambs?"

"Surely, surely," said the Gaffer. "What else should it be for? Perhaps ye think," he suggested, with a ghastly attempt at jocularity, "as I want to poison the lambs 'emselves."

"Other people's, ye might," replied Jasper.

"Ye've a foul tongue, Shepherd," said the old man.

"Keep a guard on it."

Jasper laughed drily.

"I've been told o' Satan reproving sin," he said,

"but I never *heard* him do it before. Bide here a while, and I'll bring the stuff to ye."

He went off with his long slouching stride to the hut, and the Gaffer, left alone, sat staring straight before him, breathing almost as heavily as he had done ten minutes before, after mounting the hill.

"I didn't think the old vule 'd ever be so much use to anybody," he murmured to himself. "What's death to one is death to the other! And no trace! Eh! I must make sure o' that. If that's so I'm safe in doing it, and when the road's clear, Jarge 'll learn sense, and take Catherine."

He fell into so deep a brown study that the Shepherd was back at his side without his knowing it.

"Here, *you*!" said Jasper, holding out the phial.

The Gaffer started with a choking gasp, and the hand he extended trembled like a leaf in the breeze.

"What be ye shakin' at?" asked the Shepherd.

"Nowt, nowt," answered the old man, covering his confusion by rising and setting his hat on his head. "The wind 's cold hereaway. Gi'e me the stuff. Is this all?" he asked, looking at the phial wonderingly. "There bean't much here to kill a beast—main little for two pound, Shepherd."

"Enough and to spare," said Jasper. "It's quality

not quantity, as does the trick. Pour it into some buttermilk, and let the beast drink it; he'll trouble 'ee no more."

"Be it yerb stuff?"

"Belladonny, 'tis called, distilled from them poison flowers that grow i' the churchyard."

"An' it leaves ne'er a sign? Sure?"

"Not if all the doctors in the land was called in to look for it. Be careful wi' it. Don't leave it lying about."

"Ay! I'll take care."

He started again.

"What's that?" he asked, in an awestruck whisper.

The moonbeams had grown powerful in the last half-hour, and by their light the figure of a woman was seen approaching at a distance.

"'Tis the mistress," said Jasper. "What can she want wi' me at this hour?"

"I'll take this way," said the Gaffer. "I don't want her to know I've been here, for women they talk. Mind! not a word!" and receiving a nod in answer to the caution, he slipped noiselessly behind a row of bushes while Jasper advanced to the brow of the hill to meet Catherine.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CATHERINE SEEKS A CHARM.

O what can win an old love back,  
And what can wile a new ?  
Teach me a spell to change his heart,  
Ere mine doth break in two !—*Old Song.*

CATHERINE slowly and laboriously reached the summit of the incline, and for a moment stood there, her hand upon her side, breathing heavily and unconscious of the neighbourhood of the Shepherd, who, leaning on his crook, regarded her long and keenly from under his penthouse brows before moving towards her. At the muffled sound of his feet on the short, crisp turf, she started and turned.

"Ah ! it is you, Jasper," said she, with a quick catch of her breath.

"Ye be a late visitor, Miss Catherine," said the old man. "Will 'ee come to the hut ?"

"Not yet," she answered. "I feel stifled within rooms. The free air does me good."

She breathed deeply with a long, tremulous sound,



as if she had just escaped from some asphyxiating atmosphere.

"Sit awhile," said Jasper, and taking her by the hand, led her to the mound of earth on which the Gaffer had been seated but a few minutes before. "Ye be a bit tired, mistress, 'tis a longish climb."

She sank into a sitting posture, still retaining his hand, and, supporting her chin upon her disengaged palm, remained staring before her with an intent and yet expressionless look.

Jasper took advantage of her abstraction to scan her appearance, and was shocked at the change she presented. In all his former knowledge of her she had worn a settled aspect of placid and resolute cheerfulness, wavering at moments to something which might have been called gaiety, and never falling below a grave and kindly seriousness. In the last day or two she seemed to have aged by five years. Her face was pale, and in the dead white light of the moon looked absolutely bloodless. The moonlight darkened the heavy coils of her brown hair to black, and so deepened the pallor of her skin. As she sat with her head bent, her eyes were fathomless pits of darkness, and the long lashes and the deep bistre shadows under the lower lids increased





their apparent size and gave her an appearance scarcely earthly.

She sat for some moments, lax and abandoned, like a living figure of despair, till Jasper's heart yearned over her. A man of few and deep affections, he loved Catherine with an almost paternal love, and his bowels were moved to sore compassion.

"Have a bit o' courage, mistress," he said, cherishing her hand and patting her shoulder, as if she had been an ailing child. Indeed, to his great age and sad experience she seemed scarcely more. He would have had little enough sympathy to spend on most other people afflicted with Catherine's trouble. He had seen too many hearts broken and healed again for an unhappy love affair to stir in him a much deeper compassion than he would have felt for a child crying over a spoiled toy. But with Catherine it was different. He knew, or guessed, the depths of her nature, her ready charity and inexhaustible kindness. She had sat upon his knee, a mere baby, and he owed her numberless acts of thoughtful generosity.

"Eh, dear!" he said, passing his hand over her head and letting it rest for a moment on her brow. "How hot your head is. And your hands be cold

as ice. You're in a fever, I doubt. Ye should be at home and in your bed, Miss Catherine, not out here in the chills and the dew. Come into the hut."

"No, no," she said, resisting the motion of his hand. "I am better here."

She sat for a time silent, and then, to Jasper's pity and almost terror, burst into tears.

"'Tis the first time in all my life I've seen 'ee cry," said the old man, "and I've seen you in sore trouble too. Well, tears are good for womenfolk. It's like cursin' to a man, I suppose. It don't change things, but it eases the heart. What is it, mistress? Can I do aught to help 'ee?"

"I don't know," said Catherine, when she had conquered the paroxysm sufficiently to speak. "It's like death upon me, Jasper. Like death! Oh, if I could only die!"

"Nay, nay!" said Jasper, with an old-world smile of great pity and shrewd humour combined. "It's not so bad as that, Miss Catherine."

"It's the truth," said Catherine. "My strength seems gone. I seem always tottering and falling; my eyes shut, my head like a load of lead. Down there it was different. I was strong and fierce, and

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 177

my hands felt like iron. But now, in the rising of the moon, something seems falling on me and melting my strength away. I stifle! I seem sick and faint! I haven't the strength even to utter a cry! I wonder if death is like what I feel."

Jasper shook his head with a repetition of the sad, wise smile, and silence fell again for a space. Presently, on the stillness of the moonlit prospect, a long, low, plaintive cry—a sound of infinite pathos—rose and passed. It was so strangely sorrowful that it pierced even the numbed sense of the despairing woman.

"Ay!" said Jasper, "ye hear that sound, Miss Catherine? Sad and long, like the moan of a human creature in deadly pain. It's the cry o' the white owl o' the Weald. It's the call o' the lonesome she-bird in the moonlight to her mate that's death struck and will ne'er come to her again."

"I hear," said Catherine.

"And it's the same cry that comes from your heart, Miss Catherine, the cry of one forsaken and heart-broken."

Catherine looked at him with a wild question in her eyes.

"Ay," said Jasper, "it's the love-trouble that brings

178 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

'ee here to-night. Ye love someone, and the love is tearing your heart wi' pain."

"Yes," said Catherine, dropping her head again.

"It's that, it's that, Jasper."

"Ay!" said Jasper again. "Young Jarge, mistress!"

"You know," said Catherine, peering at him half startled.

"I saw it long ago," said Jasper. "Maybe, if I'd seen it sooner I might ha' spared ye this, for ye're a lass o' courage, and ye would ha' schooled yourself to bear it. But ye're deep and close, Miss Catherine, and ye showed nowt till it was too deep-rooted in your heart, and I e'en held my tongue and boded trouble. And the trouble 's come."

"Yes," said Catherine. "I love him. And he hates me. That's why I'm here, Jasper. Listen! You are old and wise. You love me, I think! You would help me if you could?"

"Surely," said the old man, smiling again, with less humour and more sadness. "I'd help ye if I could, mistress."

"You can," said Catherine, with rapid eagerness. "You know the secrets of the earth. Give me something to win his heart back to me. I

want George. He must love me! He *shall* love me."

"There's one who deserves thee more, Miss Catherine, one who has loved thee long and dear, who will love thee till death, and would give his life to save thee from a moment's pain."

Catherine's eyes questioned him.

"Geoffrey Doone, poor lad. He loves thee dear."

"Loves *me*?" said Catherine, with wide, wandering eyes distended in the moonlight and a shaking hand upon her tumultuous heart. "Loves me? Geoffrey?"

"Ay, with his whole heart," said the shepherd.

"Poor Geoffrey!" said Catherine. "Then that's why he's so strange and sad. Oh, Jasper! Does he suffer as I suffer?"

"Ay, and has suffered for years. And ye never guessed it?"

"Never. Why, he has never given a sign!"

"No?" said Jasper, a little drily. "Think again, mistress."

"Poor Geoffrey," repeated Catherine. "But, Jasper, I *love* George."

The wounded heart, egotistic as every heart is in its suffering, forgot the sorrow that was not its own.



"I shall always love him. Jasper, I beseech you, take pity on me! Help me! I will pay you well. You shall have all I possess. I will pay you even with my heart's blood, my life! Teach me a charm to make him care for me! Teach me how to change his heart."

"That's more than the wit o' man can do, Miss Catherine," said the old man, sadly and solemnly. "Charms and philtres are for silly folk, not for strong folk like Catherine Thorpe. Ye must be sore distraught to come on an errand like that. Listen. Ye ask my help. Ye shall have it; all the help that mortal man can give ye, ye shall have. Go home, fall on your knees, and ask God to change thy heart; ask Him to teach 'ee to forget. 'Tis all that you can do, mistress, all that you can do!"

"Forget!" cried Catherine, wildly. "No, not that? It's sweet to love, for all the pain. I'd rather suffer as I suffer now, more if it could be, than cease to love at all."

Her voice trembled to silence, and for a space she was quiet.

"I tell you," she burst out again, "I love him! I will never love any other! The thought of him is killing me, killing me! He has taken his love to my

sister, a child who doesn't know what love means. But she shall not have him. He is mine!"

"That's as God wills, Miss Catherine," said the shepherd. "'Tis beyond us. Things like that don't come and go at man or woman's bidding! They be like the wind that bloweth where it listeth, like the rain that falleth on the salt sea or the cornfield. 'Tis hard, bitter hard—have I not known it? It's the common lot, wellnigh as certain as death to all the seed o' man. Pray the Lord to change 'ee. Pray to Him to see the mercy as he holds out to ye. Let your sister and the man whom God has chosen for her go their way, and turn your heart to Geoffrey Doone. Ye need a strong man to guard 'ee, poor weak thing as ye be with all your strength. Take the strongest and the best."

"I cannot! I cannot!" wailed Catherine, impressed even in her agony with the Scriptural severity of the old man's speech. "Jasper! How could I? What should I have to give to any man but George?"

"Duty! Loving care! Respect! All that makes the love of man better than the love of the beasts that perish—all that would bring love in a heart as strong as thine, once this foolish fancy o' yours was past."

"I cannot! I cannot!" cried Catherine again.

"God help'ee, mistress," said the old man. "And He will. Pray to Him. A humble and contrite heart. Eh, lass, your help is there."

"There is no help for me *there*," said Catherine. "God seems against me."

"Wild words, Miss Catherine! Wild and wicked. Think o' the little one."

He felt Catherine tremble under his hand, and, thinking her touched by that appeal, went on—

"There was a blessing in your love for her. All folks honoured 'ee for it, and saw your sacrifice. 'Twas a burnt offering, like them we read of in God's book. Day and night, sleeping and waking, your thought was for the child, the mother's latest born. Yonder stars and moon were not more true in their courses, more steadfast to their duty than ye, Miss Catherine. Shall all that be changed and forgotten? Nay, may the Lord forbid! Ye loved the child as though she had been your own first-born. Will ye come between her and the man she loves? Go home, kneel to the Lord, and ask Him to soften your heart."

"It is too late, Jasper!" she cried. "My heart seems dead. My soul seems to have left my body, and a devil to have entered in its place. If you

had heard the words I spoke to her, Jasper ! I hear them now ! They will ring in my ears till I die ! I shall hear them beyond death, when I stand in the presence of my God ! "

"Ay ! ye cursed her ! "

"I did ! "

"But ye repent, mistress, and God is merciful. With Him a sin repented is a sin forgotten."

"I do *not* repent," cried Catherine, wildly. "I don't repent ! I can't repent ! I know it was wicked, abominable ! I know God will remember it against me, that the words will sink my soul if I do not repent. But I can't. I *hate* her ! Oh, God ! I hate my sister ! My heart is black with hate of her. It burns my blood ! My brain is on fire with it ! The sight of her face, the sound of her foot on the floor, are hateful to me. I hate her ! I hate her ! "

She cried the words ragingly, with a sort of fierce delight in their repetition and in the horrible pang it caused her.

"Lord help thee, my poor lass ! " cried Jasper.

"My love is given ! " Catherine cried. "My life's wasted ! The hand of death is on me ! It's life and breath, peace and happiness, that I seek, and they are fled ! They'll never, never come to me ; I want *him*

—only him! If it meant punishment and eternal fire, I shall want him still."

"Love like that," said Jasper, "be hardly love at all. It's the craving of the beasts and birds, not of reasonable human folk."

"I know it," said the tortured woman. "But I'm like a thing without a soul, moaning like the bird yonder for what can never be mine. But I'll try to pray. I *have* tried. I tried last night. An hour I was on my knees, but not a word would come. I felt strangled, my heart was gripped as if the claws of Satan held it."

"Try, mistress, try. 'Twas prayer though you couldn't speak, 'twas the prayer o' the heart, the prayer God hears. He has heard it, Miss Catherine."

The voice of the old man trembled with a solemn gratitude.

"Ay!" he answered to her look; "God heard the prayer, though 'twas not spoken. He has sent ye to me, to the old servant that loves ye, to learn the way. Go back! Go back! To your knees, Miss Catherine! The words will come to-night, and God's peace will fall on your poor dry heart like dew."

"I will," cried Catherine, with a sudden wild hope, "I will!"

And with the words she burst into a storm of weeping

"The prayer 's answered," said the old man. "They're blessed tears, mistress. They'll wash the black thoughts from your heart, and leave it clean. Go home before the evil one has power over thee. Go home and pray."

"I will!" cried Catherine again. "Good-night! Good-night!"

She bent her head before the old man, and felt the touch of his hand upon her hair.

"Good-night and God bless 'ee, Miss Catherine!"

She drew her hood about her face and went towards the farm. As Jasper stood looking after her, the cry of the deserted bird swelled sadly on the rising breeze and died again.

## CHAPTER XV.

BRIDGET.

Shrill and keen the east wind blew  
(Hey, the wind and the weather !)  
The white rose sickened where it grew,  
For fingers o' frost and poison-dew  
Felt for its heart together !

EVEN to a nature so barren of pity and imagination—which are often convertible terms—as that of Gaffer Kingsley, murder is a dreadful business. When first the idea that to kill Bridget was a possible, nay, even an admirable, way out of the imbroglio, had risen in his dull mind, the act had looked easy of commission, and, done with due care of detail, safe enough. But from the moment when he had stowed away the shepherd's little phial in the pocket of his smock-frock doubts and trepidations began to grow in the Gaffer's mind.

He tried to pooh, pooh, and ignore them, but they returned, and by the time that he got home to the Warren they had assumed spectral proportions.

Nevertheless, the sight of George sitting solitary in

the dim parlour so revived his rage against the innocent cause of all the trouble that for the moment it again seemed easy to perpetrate his hideous design ; so the Gaffer went to bed screwed up to the pitch of desperate action, and lay for an hour or two revolving schemes of murder with a diabolic relish. Each plan which occurred to him had its flaw, its point of weakness, its possible loophole for detection, and to his quaking nerves the enterprise began to look impossible again. He tossed and tossed feverishly on his bed. At last the mere presence of the phial in the room became a terror to him, and more than once he furtively struck a light to contemplate it. Once, his dread of the possible consequences so gained on him that he opened the window of his room to dash the little bottle on the stones of the yard below, but in the very act he checked his hand with a new resolve to risk all dangers.

The dawn came, and found him still floundering in the quagmire of doubt, and he went afield with the phial in his pocket. Had the fabled bottle-imp been confined within its small limits, it could hardly have exercised a more potent influence on him, and a dozen times an hour he found himself examining the innocent-looking liquor it contained.



He went back to the Warren at his usual breakfast time, and was for the moment relieved to learn that his son had eaten his meal earlier, and had left the house. But the boy's absence acted on him very much as his presence might have done, and he began to rage at the young fool's obstinacy.

"Vule o' vules!" he cried at last, rising and smiting the table with a heavy hand; "he shall ha' the money, and ha' the land, and ha' Catherine, if I hang for 't, if I hang for 't! He shall, d—n him, he shall!"

He went out into the yard, and finding there a pile of dried branches and a bill-hook, fell to chopping them into lengths, meanwhile revolving for the hundredth time ways and means of effecting his purpose. On a farm-labourer passing through the yard he feigned a sort of ghastly hilarity, and fell to singing, in a voice like the croak of a raven—

"The young one has the bonny face,  
But the old one has the money!"

and cursed himself a moment later for the inappropriate appropriateness of the ditty. He was still slashing at the wood, when a step upon the stones of the yard made him turn. He stood for a moment staring at the intruder with his eyes protruding from his head.

It was Bridget !

She looked worn and ill, with heavy shadows under preternaturally bright eyes. His rage so surged up against her after that one moment of astonishment that his shaking hand closed on the bill-hook with the passing intention of throwing it at her. He checked that characteristic ebullition of feeling, however, and forced his twisted features to a wry smile of welcome.

"'Tis *you*, Miss Bridget !" he said. "And what brings 'ee hereaway so early of a morning. Come to pay the old man a visit, eh?"

His humour seemed to choke him, for he fell into a fit of coughing which lasted for a minute.

"Yes," said Bridget. "I did come to see you, Mr. Kingsley."

"Deary me, now !" said the Gaffer, in genuine wonder at this statement. "Think o' that ! Not to see Jarge, Miss Bridget ? Only to see me ? Sartin sure ?"

"I shall never see George again," said Bridget, steadfastly. "That's what I came to tell you. We met yesterday—it was by accident—and I told him I could never see him any more."

The Gaffer peered at her out of his foxy little eyes

to detect some sign of duplicity. He found none. The girl's face was set as with a stern resolve after a long struggle, and she spoke simply and directly.

He did not believe her any the more for that, but set his brain seeking for a possible double meaning in her words.

"And so ye came to see *me*, and to tell me *that*? Well, ye're a good wench. Tell me, do 'ee love him? He loves 'ee rarely, the mad vule!"

Bridget's eyes filled with tears, and she turned her face away.

"Well, well, don't cry, my wench. Things may mend! maybe ye think I'm angry. So I were, at first, afore I talked it o'er wi' my son Jarge. The mad vule! Eh! he's young though, and youth's the time for love-makin'! I were just the same. Ye've bewitched him rarely."

"I am sorry," said Bridget. "I didn't think—I didn't know. But I've told him that it's all over, and now he's going away."

"Poor little lass," said the Gaffer, with an ugly and clumsy pretence of sympathy which would have been at once remarked by anyone less troubled than Bridget. "But what's done can ne'er be undone."

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 191

The vule says that so long as *you* be living, he'll ne'er go courting again."

"I know," said Bridget, with a sob; "I know he loves me."

"Ay, blight him!" cried the Gaffer; then correcting himself, "There, there, don't'ee mind me; it's only my way. A crabbed old varmint, I am. But it made me mad to see him throw such a chance away, though I've forgi'en him now."

Bridget shivered and started at the word, and the Gaffer's fiery little eyes pierced her like gimlets.

"Ay," he continued, "I'm none that hard as some folk 'd make me out. But, my wench, what says your sister?"

"She says nothing," said Bridget, with a burst of tears: "she neither speaks to me nor looks at me. She will never forgive me."

"That's bad," said the old man, reflectively, holding his head on one side like a cogitating raven. "Trouble 'tween sisters is powerful bad. But ye know, Bridget, Catherine's in the right of it all through. She's the eldest, is Catherine, land and money too are hers, and the eldest should go first, though 'tis main hard on the younger."

"I know," said Bridget, brokenly. "I've been thinking of all that and of all her kindness, and I don't want to stand in the way of her happiness. I would rather die. Tell George that—tell him—tell him that—although I love him—that—Oh! Catherine! my sister!"

She tottered, clutched at the air, and seemed about to fall.

"Sit'ee down," said the Gaffer. "Sit'ee down. Ye're ill, my wench."

The Gaffer helped her to a rude bench under the parlour window.

"Lean your head against the wall. Theer! theer! Will 'ee take a sup o' buttermilk? Yes? No? Well, well!"

He patted her shoulder as she sobbed.

"And so ye want me to tell Jarge as ye'll never marry him?"

"Yes," sobbed Bridget. "Say I told you so. Tell him he must not come to the farm any more."

"Eh! but he's that mad for 'ee," said the Gaffer, shaking his head. "What use be it in denying the vule when he swears to marry none else while you be *alive*?"

His manner and speech were sympathetic and





RETURNING TO BRIDGET, HE FOUND HER LEANING AGAINST  
THE WALL.—Page 193.

soothing, but he could have torn the girl with his hands.

"The more ye weep and cry, the more mad he grows for 'ee. Eh! if sister was a hard woman, she'd wish 'ee dead and buried."

Bridget's sobs redoubled.

"She does, Mr. Kingsley, she does! Oh, what shall I do?"

The Gaffer's eyes lightened with an angry gleam of resolve.

"Bide here awhile, and I'll fetch 'ee a cup of butter-milk. 'Twill do 'ee good, my wench."

He ambled quickly into the cottage, and with his shaking fingers clutching at the murderous little phial in his pocket, found the can of buttermilk on the table, poured a portion into a glass tumbler, and with tremulous glances about the room, added to it the Shepherd's decoction.

Returning to Bridget, he found her leaning against the wall, the tears running down her white cheeks from under her closed lids.

"Here," he said, tendering the tumbler; "sup, my dear!"

"I can't," said Bridget, feebly, waving aside the glass. "I can't; 'twould choke me."



"Nay, nay ; 'twill do 'ee good, I tell 'ee ! To show there be no malice i' your heart against *me* ! Maybe things 'll come right. I'll talk wi' Catherine."

' "You'll ask her to forgive me ?" cried Bridget. "You're old. You're George's father. She'll listen to you."

"Ay, ay, lass ; I'll talk wi' her. Keep up your heart, my wench. Things will come right. 'Tis a long lane that has no turning, they say. Here, sup !"

Bridget drank, while the old man kept his eyes fixed on her with a glassy stare. He half expected to see her fall dead beneath his eyes, and at the thought his blood froze in his veins. But she merely sighed as she took the glass from her lips.

"'Twill take away thy faintness," he said, when he could trust his voice : "Come, another sup !"

She obeyed him, for the cool draught had indeed done her good for the moment.

"Ah ! that's better. The colour's come back to your cheek. Go your ways home, my wench. Don't linger."

He gave her his hand to help her to rise, and fussily led her from the yard.

"Say naught about coming here, or maybe Jarge

might think I was turning your mind again' him. But I'm your friend, lass, I'm your friend ! "

The girl's sore heart was touched by his unexpected kindness.

"Good-bye, Mr. Kingsley. Good-bye, and thank you. They say you're a hard man, but you've been good to me in my trouble, and I thank you. You'll —you'll speak to Catherine?"

"Ay, ay, I'll speak to her," he said, forcing the girl away: "Happen she'll listen to me. I'll do what I can. Theer, don't stand starin' at me like a vule, but go! Go! I'll do my best to put things straight."

She shook her head with a sad, heartbreaking little smile, and went. The Gaffer watched her figure as it passed slowly out of sight.

"I've done it!" he said to himself. "I've done it! 'Twas the only way. Shepherd said 'twas the right stuff, and left no trace."

He took up the glass from the seat on which Bridget had left it. "I wonder if she's ta'en enough to do the job? Best throw the rest away. 'Tis dangerous to leave it."

He threw the rest of the buttermilk into the gutter which traversed the yard. As he did so, a voice saluted him.

196 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"Mornin', Gaffer."

He started violently, and looking up, saw the Shepherd.

"Eh, you? Mornin'."

"What ha' ye gotten there, Gaffer?"

"Drop o' buttermilk. I was thirsty like."

"Is that why you throwed it on the ground? It's not like Gaffer Kingsley to be so wasteful!"

"It were sour," said the Gaffer, "and I'd drunk enough. What d'ye want, *you*?"

"I've come for that two pound ye promised me."

"Come again to-morrow, then," said the Gaffer, all other subjects chased from his mind by the thought of paying the money.

"Nay," said Jasper; "I want the brass now. Who was she that just left 'ee?"

"She! no one!"

He spoke the words hurriedly, and, to cover his confusion, he took up the bill-hook and continued his wood-chopping.

"That's a lie, Gaffer," said Jasper, coolly. "'Twas Bridget Thorpe."

"Oh, ay," said the Gaffer, chopping away. "She passed by gate, and gave me a nod. We don't speak,

she and me, now I ha' bidden her keep clear o' my son Jarge."

Jasper looked at him fixedly, and the Gaffer continued, with the best air of commonplace he could assume—

"Been down to the farm, you?"

"No," said Jasper; "I'm going down now. What about that dog, Gaffer? Ha' ye given him the stuff yet?"

"No, I'll gie it him to-night, when he comes here-away. Leaves ne'er a trace, ye say?"

This last with his back turned, and over his shoulder.

"Nay," said Jasper. "Leastways, not when 'tis paid for," he added drily.

The Gaffer sighed, turned, and unwillingly drew out the money.

"Thank 'ee," said Jasper. "Where's thy son, Gaffer?"

"Fooling about somewhere," replied the old man, "Say, *you*! What was Miss Catherine doin' last night, up to the folds."

"Reckon that's her business, not yours."

"Happen," said the Gaffer, "she saw *me* up yonder?"

"Nay," replied the Shepherd, to the old man's great relief. "Mornin', Gaffer. Take care o' that stuff, don't leave it lyin' about ! "

"I'll be careful," the Gaffer answered.

"'Twas on the tip o' my tongue," he murmured to himself, "to ask him how long it takes to work ? Maybe she's sickening *now*, on the road home, and happen she'll speak o' coming *here*. I was a vule to do it—a born vule ! Why did she come here, temptin' me wi' her white face, and reminding me o' what Jarge said—as he'd never ha' Catherine while she was livin' ? If she dies an' they find out I've done it, happen I'll *hang* ! "

In an agony of terror, as if he felt the rope already round his neck, the Gaffer crawled into the house, and, shutting himself up in his own bedroom, collapsed upon the bed.

His feeble yet cunning little mind, only capable of seizing one idea at a time, now occupied itself entirely with thoughts of the hangman. No thrill of pity, no feeling of remorse mingled with the old man's dread—which was almost purely physical.

Suddenly he remembered the phial, which he still carried in his pocket ; and first peering from the window to see that the coast was clear, he crept

downstairs and made his way to a large duck-pond in the field adjoining his dwelling. Whistling feebly as he went, and assuming an air of careless indifference, he reached the pond, gazed round and round, and then, quickly and stealthily, cast the phial into the water.

Through the green slime it sank, down, down, sending up bubbles like a living thing !

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A FRIEND IN NEED.

There came a Shepherd with his crook  
Striding so boldly by,  
And he saw the lambkin fleecy white  
Wounded and like to die ;  
And he lifted it up on his broad, broad back  
And bore it home to the fold,  
Sing, ho ! the flocks of the Silver Fleece  
And the Shepherd with Crook of Gold.  
—*Songs of the Weald.*

BRIDGET left the Warren after her interview with the Gaffer, and crept slowly on her homeward road to the farm.

The mellow sunshine lay about the lanes and the surrounding fields, but the familiar beauty of the scene left her untouched. Heart and brain seemed alike empty. She had been sustained on her journey to the Gaffer's house by the heroic resolution to cut the net of trouble which surrounded her and all she loved.

The task accomplished, the words spoken, she was conscious at first of nothing but a dull aching

vacuum, passing gradually into a dull content. She shivered in the warm air, and drew her cloak more closely around her as if it had been winter time, but the shivering increased in violence and frequency, and her limbs seemed agitated as if by a palsy.

"I am going to die, perhaps," she said to herself.

In her strained, half-insane condition of mind, the awful thought seemed welcome.

"George will be free then to obey his father, and Catherine will forgive me when I am gone."

But a young and healthy creature was not likely to look long in that fashion on the heart-freezing terror of death.

"I can't! I can't leave him! God will not be so cruel! Help me! help me, somebody!"

As if in answer to her prayer, the trembling of her limbs grew fainter and then ceased. She walked on, falling back into her former vacuous condition, until she was within sight of the chimney-pots of the farm, when the trembling seized her again more violently than before.

Her head swam, her eyes were dim, there was a sound in her ears as of rushing water.

She fought hard against the sensations which were overwhelming her, and with tottering feet had cov-



ered another fifty yards when the solid ground seemed to slide from beneath her. She fell with no shock, and woke to partial recognition to find herself lying on the soft turf by the roadside.

She tried to rise, but her limbs were slack and nerveless ; to cry for help, but her voice sounded dim and faint in her own ears.

Her arms bent beneath the weight of her body, and she lay supine, conscious of nothing but a strong nausea and a dull internal discomfort, growing rapidly into positive pain. Then she slipped into complete unconsciousness.

She had lain so for half an hour before the hot stillness of the lane was stirred by any other sounds than the light twitter of grass and leaf and an occasional trill of song from the birds sheltering from the noon-tide heat. Then a slow footstep came round the bend of the lane, and Jasper the shepherd hove in sight, plodding on with his long, slow stride towards the farm.

His eyes fell on the prostrate form. He did not at first recognise it, for Bridget lay face downwards in the long grass of the wayside.

"What ha' we here?" said Jasper, peering down on the prostrate form. "It's o'er early i' the day to

he took like that, and a young 'un, too. Eh, Lord alive, 'tis Miss Bridget! Poor little lass! What ails 'ee? Come, come, it's no good for 'ee to lie here i' the public road, wi' the sun hot on thy head, too."

He tried first to turn the girl over by lifting her arm, but the limp, dead weight of the body startled him. He knelt beside her, and turned her face to the light. It was deadly white. The eyes opened and looked vacantly at him, with no recognition. The pupils were widely dilated.

"Lord Almighty!" said the old man, in a low, deep tone of doubt and horror.

After staring at the face for a moment, he clasped his still sturdy arms about the girl's figure, and raised her to his shoulder. She was a heavy weight, but he carried her swiftly and lightly at double his usual speed to the farm.

Amanda was in the yard, casting handfuls of barley to a crowd of clucking poultry. She screamed at the sudden apparition of Jasper carrying her young mistress, and began to pour out a flood of incoherent questions and exclamations.

"Hold thy clack!" said Jasper, with more than his usual contempt for feminine incapacity of accept-

ing an unexpected situation. "Hold thy clack, wench, and go tell Miss Catherine that her sister is took ill."

Amanda fled upon her errand, and almost fell into the arms of Catherine, who entered the yard at that moment from one of the outhouses.

Jasper marched with his burden into the kitchen, and tenderly depositing Bridget in a chair, stood above her, attentively examining her face, the pupils of her eyes, and feeling her hands and pulse. A languid step sounded on the floor ; he raised his head. It was Catherine.

"What is this?" she asked, looking down with an expressionless face at the lax figure in the chair.

"I found her at the roadside," whispered Jasper, "lyin' i' the grass like a dead thing. She's sick, she's sore sick, Miss Catherine."

"She has fainted," said Catherine, calmly. "Stop blubbering," she continued, with a cold contempt, to Amanda, "and bring a little water."

Amanda clattered out of the kitchen with a basin.

"'Tis no common faint," said Jasper, thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" asked Catherine, still in the same dull fashion. "Is she ill?"

Jasper nodded, with his eyes on her face.

"There's no creature in the parish that's so ill," he replied. "Get her to bed, Miss Catherine."

"Do you mean," asked Catherine, "that she is *really* ill—that her life is in danger?"

"Not if I can help it," returned the old man. "But I'll tell 'ee one thing : ye may thank God as 'twas I that found her! Get her to bed. 'Tis no time to talk. Lend thy missis a hand, Amandy."

He stalked from the kitchen, and catching sight of a labourer loading a cart at a little distance, hailed him :

"Ye know my hut?" he said quickly to the man. "My hut up on the Weald? Go there, and on the end o' the shelf over the door ye'll find a bottle, a long green bottle wi' a white label half scraped off. Bring it to me here. And hark 'ee, run as if your life depended on it! Miss Bridget 's sick, and like to die."

The man stared at him for a second in silence, and then started off at a round pace towards the Weald.

"Run, lad, run for your life!" Jasper shouted after him.

He watched the man's figure out of sight, and then returned to the kitchen, and sat staring at the floor till aroused by Catherine's entrance.

"Jasper," she said agitatedly, "you are right. Bridget is very ill. She is quite insensible."

Her stony, imperturbable look had gone ; she was more like the Catherine of former days.

"Ay," he said, "she's ailing badly, but, with God's help, we'll put her right. Has she said aught?"

"She called my name, though she didn't seem to know me when I spoke to her, and she spoke of—of George, and of the Gaffer."

"The Gaffer?" said Jasper, quickly. "Ay, she spoke o' the Gaffer, ye say? Let me go in and see her, Miss Catherine. I've sent Jabez to the hut for a bottle o' stuff. Let me know when he comes wi' it."

Catherine answered by a sign, and, as the old man left the room, sank down in the seat which he had vacated.

"She's ill," she said to herself, monotonously. "She's very ill. It's so sudden. Can she be dying?"

The words she had spoken to Bridget came back to her memory, and struck her brain like a blow. She had wished her sister dead! Was God going to answer her infamous prayer?

She was aroused from a dazed condition of horror by the entrance of Amanda.

"Missis! Missis!" screamed the terrified hand-

maid, "Miss Bridget 's a-dying, sure and sartain ! She's crying out and she's twistin' all over the bed !"

"Run for the doctor !" cried Catherine, springing up. "Doctor Dutton ! If he isn't at home, follow him till you find him. Tell him it's life or death !"

She raced upstairs, with Bridget's cries ringing in her ears, and stood at the threshold of her room frozen to stone by the sight she beheld. Her sister, writhing on her bed in agonies of violent sickness, was prevented from rising only by the pressure of Jasper's right hand upon her shoulders. His left hand held a water-basin.

"Don't 'ee be feared, Miss Catherine," said the old man. "She'll do herself no damage. I've gi'en her mustard and hot water to drink, and, please God, she's been vomiting. The worst's over, if Jabez will only make haste wi' the stuff I've sent him for."

Even as he spoke the paroxysm passed, and Bridget fell back into unconsciousness.

"She's *dying* !" cried Catherine, horrified at the sudden quiet as she had been at the noise and the convulsions.

"Nay, nay," said Jasper, wiping his forehead. "Trust me. I never tell lies ; ye know that, Miss Catherine. She 's a good chance yet. The fit 'll

208 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

come on her again, and more than once maybe, but 'twill pass. I know the symptoms. I've seen 'em afore to-day, in dumb creatures." As he spoke he left the bedside, and opening the window, cast out the contents of the basin into the open yard.

"What is it?" panted Catherine, hoarsely, with distended eyes of horror glaring alternately at Jasper's face and at the figure on the bed.

"There 'll be time enough to talk of that later on," answered Jasper, averting his eyes. "We must get to work. The lass's life is still in danger."

Catherine fell into a chair, staring at him like one distraught.

"Bear up, Miss Catherine!" said Jasper. "Keep a brave heart. She 'll come through it, please God! Stay you with her. I've done all I can for the time, till Jabez brings the stuff."

He patted her reassuringly on the shoulder, and went downstairs and out into the yard. There he met Dutton returning with Amanda. The man of science snorted disdainfully at the sight of his rival practitioner.

"Has *he* been tampering with the case?" he asked Amanda, loftily.

She stopped in her whimpering to look at him

wonderingly, and shook her head before resuming.

"So much the better," said Dutton, misreading the gesture. "The infernal old quack ought to be laid by the heels. If he's allowed in the sick-room I'll throw up the case."

Jasper heard the words, as Dutton had meant he should, but took no heed of them, leaning on the gate of the yard and looking eagerly towards the Weald in anxious expectation of the return of his messenger. Then, with a grim smile, he walked to the spot where the contents of the basin had fallen and were soaking into the ground. Bending down, he scraped the place with his foot, and effaced all traces of the slimy discoloration.

"I was right," he muttered to himself, "'Tis an ugly job !"

Catherine, sitting in a stony horror beside the bed, listening to Bridget's breathing with a horrible fear that each heave of her bosom might be her last, or that the convulsions which had terrified her would again begin, heard the doctor mounting the stair and passing along the corridor, but did not recognise his step. She answered his tap at the door, and at his appearance in the room sprang from her seat and ran to him.



"Thank God you've come!" she cried.

Women, even the least conventional, are creatures of use and wont, and love conventionalities in solid human form. She trusted Jasper, and believed profoundly in his skill, and she had a sort of good-humoured tolerant contempt for Dutton as a general practitioner; but at the sight of him his uncouth rival's assurances were forgotten, and all her faith for the moment was given to the diploma'd Science represented by the village surgeon.

"Thank God you've come! Quick. Tell me what we must do! Jasper says my sister is dying!"

Dutton, bending over the patient, looked round, with an angry scowl.

"So that old quacksalver has been meddling," he said. "What brings him here, away from the beasts that are his fit companions?"

"He found her lying in the road, and brought her home," replied Catherine. "He says she's in great danger."

"I fear he's right for once," said Dutton, with Bridget's pulse between his fingers.

"She has had convulsions—terrible convulsions," said Catherine.

"Just so," said Dutton, majestically. "'Tis a brain shock, following an exacerbation of the nervous centres. Pulse weak, breathing irregular? I'll go home and bring you some medicine. Meanwhile, keep her cool and dry, and prevent that old ass from meddling with her. If I hear of any interference with the case I'll throw it up. How a woman of your position and education, Miss Catherine, can listen to the rubbish of an old ignoramus like that—an ignoramus who can't even speak our own language—I cannot understand."

"Oh, go!" cried Catherine. "Go and send what is necessary. The convulsions might return at any moment. Tell me, is she really ill?"

"She is dangerously ill," said Dutton. "'Twill be a long affair, maybe weeks. If the case fell into the hands of an irregular practitioner, I shudder to think what the consequences might be."

Catherine fell back into her seat, moaning and wringing her hands, a pitiful spectacle to anyone who knew her well, and with what quiet courage it was her wont to receive any trouble, however severe.

"Well, well," said Dutton, still airing his small importance: "I've diagnosed the case fairly well, I think. We'll try a sedative. I'll bring it myself,

presently. We have to guard against the cerebral excitement which will probably accompany the return of consciousness."

He marched away, to find Jasper still leaning on the yard gate. The old man turned at the sound of his footstep, and held the gate open with a politeness which, to an acuter mind than Dutton's, might have been a little suspicious.

The doctor walked through with a haughty "Thank you, my man." Twenty yards from the gate he was passed by a rustic running fast, with a big green bottle in his hand. He took no heed of him, except to answer his panting salute by a patronising nod.

## CHAPTER XVII.

GEORGE KINGSLEY.

And who has raised a wicked hand  
To bear my love from me?  
Tho' he were ten times kith and kin,  
An ill death he should dee!—*Scottish Ballad.*

GAFFER KINGSLEY, meanwhile, with a pretence of light-hearted industry which was the very antipodes of his real feeling, went on chopping at his wood, and singing in a raucous wheeze such scraps of rustic song as came into his mind. The old blackguard, after seventy odd years of ignorance of its existence, had found his nervous system, and every chance sound around about filled his scraggy frame with tremors.

Footsteps passed the gate. He shivered as he listened to their approach, and, with a sense of relief which was in itself an agony, heard them die away in the distance.

One step paused at a little distance from him. Bracing himself to receive the touch of a hand upon

his shoulder, and the sound of an accusing voice in his ear, he chopped blindly at the piece of wood he held upon the block. When at last, after what seemed to him an incalculable length of time, a voice spoke—it was a full half-minute before he comprehended what it really was—a whining appeal for charity from a wayside beggar. He turned and cursed the intruder with a dreadful vehemence, shaking his bill-hook at him with paralytic rage, and spitting profanity after him by the mouthful after he had retreated.

He was thus occupied when George entered the yard. The young man stood staring at him in amazement. The Gaffer quieted himself with a great effort, and turned to his task again.

"What has Bridget Thorpe been doing here?" asked George suddenly.

The question so shook his father's already disordered nerves that he missed his stroke at the branch he was chopping, and cut deeply into the block.

"Bridget?" he answered, in a shaking voice, tugging out the bill-hook with a violent effort. "Bridget Thorpe? Hereaways? What should she do here! I'd loike to see her comin' hereaways. I'd——" He gave a vicious chop to eke out his meaning.

"But she *has* been here," said George, "I was at the corner of the ten-acre an hour ago, and she passed me on the road beneath."

"Did she say she'd been here?" asked the Gaffer.

"No," said George, "I didn't speak to her, nor she to me—she didn't see me. But I know she has been here, because the road leads nowhere else."

"I've seen nowt o' the wench," said the Gaffer, "and don't want to. Lookee here, *you*! You and me has had many a battle, and, old as I be, I ha' allays come off best. When I say a thing, I mean a thing, see? and nowt stands i' my way. Him that crosses me I serve like this clump o' wood."

He struck the block a resounding blow.

"He goes to the fire!"

"What have you been saying to Bridget?" asked George again, doggedly avoiding his father's challenge to battle.

"I've said nowt to her. How should I, when I haven't *seen* her?"

"If you've been tormenting her," cried George, "if you've told her that I shall ever change, or that I have ceased to care for her, or that I shall ever care for her sister, you've done a base thing, father,

which I'll never forgive! The poor child looked like death."

The Gaffer shook at the word.

"I said nowt to her, I tell 'ee. I've said all I've got to say. Be wise in time, you! Do as I bid 'ee, and all the land 'll be yourn some day, when I die! Cross me, and I'll crush your turnip-faced wench under my heel—ay, and you too!"

"If you harmed a hair of her head——" said George, through his clenched teeth.

"Well!" said the Gaffer, jeeringly.

"God forgive me," said George, "but I think I should kill you!"

"What?" cried the old man, striding towards him.

"Bully those who fear you," said George. "Threaten those you can hurt. You've no power over me or mine."

"We'll see about that," said the Gaffer, going back to his wood-chopping with a nod of evil meaning. "When time comes, blame yourself, not me. I'll tame 'ee, as I tamed your mother before ye."

A beat of horse's hoofs, which had been nearing the Warren unmarked by either father or son, rang with a startling suddenness on the stones of the road

a score of yards away, and Geoffrey Doone heaved in sight, mounted on his roadster. He pulled up at the gate, and dismounted.

The Gaffer's face went ashen white, but George, wondering what business had brought Geoffrey there, did not look at him.

"George, my lad," said Geoffrey, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "I've bad news for you. Be a man, and bear it. You're wanted down at the farm."

"It's Bridget?" cried the lover.

"Ay," said Geoffrey, "it's Bridget. She's taken ill."

"Ill? How?"

"She was found by Jasper lying by the roadside, insensible. He carried her home, and soon after entering the house she was seized with convulsions. Dutton was called in. He had her put to bed at once. He says it's a shock to the brain. But Jasper——"

He paused, then added—

"Well, you may as well hear it from me as from another. Jasper took me aside and told me that 'twas poison."

George staggered.

"Poison!" he gasped. "Impossible!"



"Rubbish!" murmured the Gaffer. "Jasper's a vule."

"So Dutton said, but the old man stuck to it 'twas the truth. I wanted to ask you, Gaffer, if she took anything when she was here?"

"Here?" repeated the Gaffer. "She's never been hereaway at all."

"Not been here!" cried Geoffrey. "Why, Jasper says he saw her leaving the Warren on her way home."

The old man felt his son's eyes upon his face.

"Ay, I remember now," he said: "she did pass this way and gi'e me a nod. I thought nowt of it. Say, you! Be she sensible? Has she said nowt?"

"Nothing that I know of. She has called for George, though I doubt if she'll know him when she sees him."

The Gaffer's ugly mask did not change a muscle, but he drew a tremulous breath of relief.

"She's like a woman paralysed and in deadly pain, then the convulsions come and seem tearing her to pieces. She's strange coloured too, as if some ugly stuff was in her blood."

His glance turned to George, who was leaning

against the wall with his face-gone grey, his eyes glazed, his whole frame shaking.

"Take heart, lad! Jasper says he'll save her. Don't linger. The poor child has called out your name more than once, and she may want to see you."

George nodded, and motioned Geoffrey to the gate without looking at him.

"I'll come; I'll come," he said. "Go and say I'm coming."

Geoffrey mounted and rode away.

The Gaffer took up his bill-hook with a shaking hand, not daring to look towards his son. George, pale as a corpse, walked to him and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Father," he said, in a harsh voice unlike his own.

"Well," answered the old man, shrinking at the touch.

"Tell me what this means. Why did you lie to Geoffrey? Why did you deny at first that Bridget had been here?"

"I denied nowt," cried the Gaffer. "Take your hand off!"

He fiercely shook himself free.

"You heard what he said," George continued.  
"That Bridget had taken *poison*!"

"Ay! what's that to me?"

"It's life and death to *me*," said George. "I know you hate her. I know that you would gladly see her dead. Answer: what took place when she was here? You have admitted that you spoke together. What else? Did she eat or drink anything in this place?"

"Nay, neither bite nor sup," replied the old man, shivering like a leaf.

"Look me in the face and say that!" said George.

The Gaffer raised his eyes, but they wandered nervously all over his son's face. His lips moved, but only a moan of inarticulate sound was audible.

"George," he cried at last, "I'll not deceive'ee. She was faint, and I give the poor wench a drink o' butter-milk from the churn. How could that harm her?"

"It could not," said George, "unless——"

"Unless!" echoed the Gaffer. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean," cried George, "that if Bridget has taken poison, 'twas *you* that gave it to her!"

"What!" screamed the old wretch, with a livid





"JARGE! JARGE!" CRIED THE GAFFER, "STOP—WHERE BE  
'EE GOING?"—Page 221.

face of deadly fear, but doing his best to bluster down the accusation. "D'ye dare——"

"Tell me the truth," said George. "There may be time yet."

"I've told 'ee all I got to tell," murmured the Gaffer.

"You swear," said George, "that you did nothing to harm her?"

"I swear it!" cried the old man. "I swear it!"

"Very well," said George, and started towards the gate.

"Jarge, Jarge!" cried the Gaffer: "stop—where be 'ee going?"

"I am going to the farm. I shall tell them there that Bridget drank a glass of milk here, and that that may have caused her illness."

"Ye can't say that, Jarge! Ye mustn't say that!"

"Why not?"

"Because—ye 'll set folk talking. They're a foul-mouthed lot hereaways, and they know I bear the wench no good will."

"And what then?"

"They might say things," groaned the Gaffer;  
"Jarge, bide here. Don't go down yonder. Would

ye put the rope round your father's neck? Stay here, and I'll tell 'ee the truth."

"The truth," cried George.

"Ay, the God's truth."

He crept nearer to his son shivering as with an ague.

"I done it for your sake, Jarge!"

"For my sake! You did—what? What have you done?"

"Hush, hush—folk'll hear ye. I've cleared the way for 'ee to Catherine. Ye said ye'd ne'er ha' her while Bridget was alive. Well, ye may count her dead, for neither you nor any man can save her. I've gi'en her poison stuff to drink."

"*You!* my father? Then Jasper was right!"

"Ay, d—n him!" cried the old man. "'Twas from him I got the stuff, and if he guesses I used it 'twill cost me my life, or else a power o' money, Jarge! Stop! Don't go!"

He clung to the young man with trembling hands.

"Let me pass!" cried George, struggling to free himself of the tenacious grip.

"Not to speak agin me!" wailed the Gaffer.

"Not to say your father's a murderer! Not to put the rope round my neck! I tell 'ee, if ye go down

yonder and tell 'em what ye know, I'll hang for it, and 'twill be *your* doing. Jarge, Jarge! I done it all for *you*! 'Twas for you I wanted Catherine—wanted the money—wanted the land. And you shall ha' 'em, ha' 'em all, and mine too, all of it, Jarge, every acre and every penny. I swear it. I'll go to the lawyer this day and make it over to 'ee."

"My God, my God!" cried George. "Let me go! I'll speak at any cost. I'll save her."

"No, no, Jarge; ye can't have the heart to do it!"

"Listen," cried George. "There is one way. Go to the farm yourself—tell them there has been an accident—that there was poison here—that Bridget drank it by mistake—that—go—go! You will know what to say."

"I'll go—I'll go!" said the Gaffer.

He made a few tottering steps towards the gate.

"And I'll come with you," said George, following and catching him up.

"What! ye don't trust me?" snarled the old man.

"Trust you!" repeated George, bitterly; "no!"

"Then I'll bide here," said the Gaffer, "and if 'tis a hanging job I'll face it out. Say what ye will, ye can prove nowt. The stuff leaves no trace. It's oath agin oath, and mine 's as good as yourn. Bide



where ye be ! " he cried fiercely, intercepting George's passage.

For the moment he was desperate. His one idea was to give the poison time to work, and then to face the consequences. After all, where was the proof? But his resolution failed.

"Jarge, Jarge ! ye can't give me up, lad. I'm your father, and I did it for your sake. Take pity !"

"What pity had you on *her* ? " asked George.

"Think again, lad, think again ! If ye speak, if ye give me up, all the world will know it, and the shame will fall on *you* as well."

"Shame or no shame," said George, "she shall live."

"She shannot, she shannot ! " screamed the old man, "not if I strangle her with my own hands. Vule, vule ! What can ye prove ? This stuff leaves no trace, I tell 'ee. All the doctors in the land can't find it. Stand ! Ye *sha'n't* go."

He seized the bill-hook, and swung it over his head, transformed with rage and fear, and looking unnaturally tall.

"I'll kill 'ee first, and swing for both, if I must !"

George pressed on with a white face.

"Then kill me, as you've killed *her*."

The bill-hook fell clanking to the ground, and the Gaffer threw himself to his knees, clasping George's legs.

"Jarge! My son! Take the money. Take the land. Take all I've got, but keep my secret. I'm an old man. I can't last long. I'll go over sea to Ameriky. Anything, anything! Don't put the rope round the neck o' me, your father! your father! Jarge! Jarge! For the love of God!"

His voice died in his throat as George broke from him, and he fell grovelling on the earth. By the time he had gathered his shaking bones together, and crawled to the gate, the young man's figure had disappeared round the bend of the road.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### BANE AND ANTIDOTE.

By poison seed  
• O' tangled weed,  
And bloom o' deadly power,  
Nature soweth soft remede  
O' healing leafe and flower—  
The darnel by the nettle grows,  
The cure beside the blight—  
And where the spotted snakesroot blows  
Lurks the milkwort white.—*Old Song.*

JASPER took the bottle from his messenger, and strode to the kitchen, where he found Catherine sitting by the window. Her hands were clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on the floor. A heavy tress of her dark hair, escaping from the knot in which it had been bound, fell across her cheek, accentuating the deadly pallor of her face.

"I've got the stuff, Miss Catherine," said Jasper.  
"Shall I go up?"

She raised her eyes.

"Jasper, you have never deceived me. Tell me, tell me truly, can you save her?"

"Sure enough," answered Jasper. "If I can do what I want to do before you fool comes back wi' his drugs, I can save her and I will."

"He says," said Catherine, "that if you meddle with the case, he will have nothing to do with it."

"So much the better for the little missie," said Jasper; "I'd be loth to trust the life of a beast with yonder blithering fool, let alone a Christian. I tell ye, Miss Catherine, I can cure her. *He* knows nowt about it. I know all."

Thoughts of which Jasper could guess nothing were passing through Catherine's mind. Her keen wits had gone ahead of the actual situation, and were busy with the future. Her quarrel with her sister, and the grounds of it, were public property by now. Suppose Jasper's belief in his own skill was simply the overweening conceit of an old-world, ignorant peasant who felt his rule-of-thumb knowledge pitted against the modern science he despised? Suppose he failed to work the cure he so boldly guaranteed, and Dutton withdrew, as he would certainly do if his claims to professional respect were thrown aside? If Bridget died what would be the public verdict? Would not people believe—would she not have given them a right to believe—that she had deliberately

rejected the best aid at hand in order that her sister might die? She saw the risk, and it was terrible. Her courage quailed before it.

"Miss Catherine," said Jasper, solemnly, noting her indecision, "listen to me. So sure as you let me go to your sister's bedside, so sure shall she be whole and sound in a day or two. So sure as yon Dutton has the fettlin' of her, so sure she'll die. He knows nowt o' the business—nowt at all. Ye know me. I'm no liar nor bragger. I'll save your sister, if you trust her i' my hands."

His solemn adjuration decided her.

"Come," she said simply, and rising, led the way upstairs to Bridget's chamber.

The girl was lying as they had left her, pale and silent, with closed eyes. At the sound of their entrance she looked towards them with a wandering, almost witless gaze. Her eyes dwelt on Catherine for a second or two without recognition, then she trembled and cowered beneath the bedclothes.

"No, no!" she cried. "Go away, I'm afraid of you!"

Catherine turned a look of speechless agony on Jasper. He nodded.

"Go, since the sight o' ye disturbs her! 'Tis not

your sister that speaks, 'tis the sickness in her. Go, Miss Catherine; I'll send for ye presently, and ye'll have a kindlier welcome."

Catherine went back to the kitchen, and sank again into her seat by the window. She could think to no purpose; she had not even a definite, nameable feeling. Her brain was heavy, her heart burned in her breast like fire within the naked hand. Bridget was ill, dying perhaps, and she had driven her from her side. The words she had spoken to Bridget on that dreadful night hummed through her mind. Could she ever have spoken them, or was the whole series of dreadful events simply a frightful dream?

Geoffrey, booted and spurred, came on tiptoe into the brick-paved kitchen.

"Well," he asked softly, but as cheerily as he could, "how goes it? Is she better?"

"Jasper is with her," said Catherine; "he says he can save her."

"Why are *you* not with her too? This is no time for you to be apart."

"I was there just now," said Catherine. "She saw me, and she cried. She was afraid of me. That is what all our love has come to. Well, it's the world's way!"

230 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"It's only her delirium," said Geoffrey soothingly. "Sick people are often like that, and turn from those they love most."

"No," replied Catherine. "It's her *heart*! Hard as mine! She's suffering—dying, perhaps—and I, who should be at her side to help and comfort her, sit here helpless! I reared her like a mother, I cherished her, and watched her grow: I loved her, and now I'm the one from whom she shrinks—my presence adds to her pain. Oh, if she should die!"

She shuddered, and buried her face in her hands. "Even at the thought of that the tears won't come!"

She took the heavy lock of hair which fell across her cheek, and gnawed at it.

"My heart's like stone!"

Geoffrey stood looking miserably down at her, fain to offer comfort, but finding none.

"Is the doctor with her still?" he asked, for lack of anything better to say.

"No, he has gone home for some medicine."

"And Jasper? Has he said anything?"

"Nothing, except that he will save her."

"Go to her, Catherine," said Geoffrey. "Go to the little one. Of all living souls you should be the nearest to her now."

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 231

"Haven't I told you," cried Catherine, half fiercely, "she doesn't want me—she——"

"Don't believe that," said Geoffrey. "Surely you're not bitter still against your sister, at such a moment as this?"

"I don't know. Don't ask me. Leave me, and don't torture me, or I shall go mad!"

Jasper descended from the bedroom, and, seeing Geoffrey, paused a moment.

"You've said nowt to her of the poison?" he whispered, crossing him.

Geoffrey shook his head, and Jasper, laying his finger on his lips as a hint to continued caution, passed on to Catherine.

"I believe your sister's saved, Miss Catherine; but 'twill be a longish job before she's well and about again. There's trouble there—sore trouble, that preys upon the heart; and she's had a cruel shock beside."

Catherine listened with a dull face, seeming scarcely to understand.

"Listen, Miss Catherine," continued the old man. "You've had faith in your old sarvant, and I thank 'ee for it. But ye must have faith to the end, or 'tis no use. Yon doctor vule will be back here wi' his



drugs directly. He hasn't the pluck to do much harm, but it's a ticklish case, and Miss Bridget must take none o' his stuff. Ye can manage that without him knowing aught about it?"

He had scarcely spoken when Dutton's voice was heard in the yard, and a second after he entered, with a bottle in his hand.

"Well, busybody," he cried, catching sight of Jasper; "are you ready with any new charms and incantations? I suppose you think that what science can't do superstition can?"

"I know nowt o' superstition, as ye call it," returned Jasper, stolidly, "and less o' science, but I know the yerbs and the ways o' nature. You've given the poor lass up, likely?"

"I know this," said Dutton, "that if she doesn't improve under my treatment before night, she'll possibly die."

Catherine gave a sob at the word, and Jasper laughed.

"Don't mind him, Miss Catherine. Miss Bridget won't die this time."

"What!" cried Dutton, aghast at the old man's calm superiority. "You—an ignoramus, a bump-

kin, dare to question the skill of a certificated medical practitioner ! Truly——"

Rage and astonishment choked him, and he stood swelling and gobbling at Jasper like a turkey-cock. The Shepherd looked at him calmly, his gums bared by a soundless laugh. Dutton thumped the bottle on the table, and marched to the window.

"There ye be, Miss Catherine!" said Jasper, giving her the bottle, with a pressure of the hand and a signal to her to remember his warning. "The directions is writ on the label."

Catherine looked at him speechless. He nodded reassuringly, and she left the room.

"And pray," said Dutton, turning with an affectation of ironical respect to the Shepherd, "what is your diagnosis of the case, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"What's my what?" asked Jasper.

"What is the matter with the patient, according to *you*?"

"Just this," said Jasper, quietly. "She's taken poison stuff o' some kind."

"Poison!" repeated Dutton.

"Hold your whist, sir!" said Jasper, in a voice like the growl of a bulldog. "Miss Catherine knows

nowt about it. She has trouble enough to bear."

"Poison!" repeated Dutton, in a lower tone, and with intense contempt.

"The old man may be right," said Geoffrey to Dutton. "He has skill, and I've known cases which puzzled the knowing ones, but where outsiders guessed right."

"I took you for a sensible fellow," said Dutton, angrily. "Poison! I'll stake my reputation on my diagnosis. It's a shock to the cerebral system, following close on a nerve crisis. At first I suspected typhoid, but the symptoms changed. I confess myself rather puzzled, but I think her constitution will pull her through. But if that old ignoramus is allowed to meddle into my treatment, I warn you once more, I'll resign the case."

"When the black crows fly," muttered Jasper, drily, "then comes the sick man's chance!"

Dutton contented himself with a glance of lofty disdain, and, turning to Geoffrey, said—

"I must get away. Farmer Morris's bay mare is expected to foal to-day. I shall be there till four o'clock, and after that I shall call again."

Geoffrey went out with him into the yard, where Dutton's wrath against Jasper exploded anew.

"The old sorcerer! The madman! Do we live in the Middle Ages or in the nineteenth century? If this girl dies—and I warn you that she may—I'll have the old wretch imprisoned for practising illegally on the bodies of her Majesty's lieges!"

"Suppose he 's right?" said Geoffrey. "Suppose she is suffering from some poison?"

"Suppose the moon is made of green cheese!" cried Dutton. "I tell you the man is an ass; and these idiots of villagers, these ignorant hounds, accept his mumbo-jumbo and reject my science. Even Catherine Thorpe, a sensible woman, rich, a person with a head on her shoulders, doubts my skill and engages this Cagliostro of the pigstye! She listens to his d—d incantations! She goes to him at dead of night to ask for drams and love-philtres."

"What d'ye mean by that?" asked Geoffrey, startled.

"What I say," retorted Dutton. "She was seen up at the sheepfolds, last night, alone, at midnight, on the quest, I suppose, for some drug to cure her cows of barrenness and her lame ducks of the falling sickness."

"Who told you that?" demanded his companion.

"The Gaffer. He saw her on the Weald, and,

being curious, watched her. A woman like that!—a rich woman—consulting a ragged fortune-telling charlatan, her own servant!"

"Last night?" said Geoffrey, with bent brows.

"Yes, last night. And to-day, you see, she brings down the old quack to defeat my science."

They had reached the gate by this time, and looking absently down the lane, saw George Kingsley approaching the house. His head was bent, he walked slowly and hesitatingly, and when within a hundred yards of them stopped and half turned, as if to retrace his steps. Catching sight of Geoffrey and the Doctor, he came on with an obvious effort. He was very pale, and looked horribly disturbed.

"Does *he* know of this?" asked Dutton.

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "I told him a while ago. You know he's in love with the little lass, and it was a sad shock to him."

George came up to them.

"Well?" he said, with a quick pant in his voice.

"What news?"

"Bad, I fear," said Geoffrey. "The doctor here says——"

"I say nothing," said Dutton. "I have done what I can for her at present."

"Tell me," cried George, "tell me the truth. I can bear it. Is she—is she dying?"

"A short time will determine. Her constitution, aided by my remedies, may pull her through. I have administered an antispasmodic. And now, before the result is seen, I am as good as shown the door because an ignorant old ass talks of the girl being poisoned."

George drew his breath sharply, and reaching out his hand supported himself by the gate-post. His face went paler. He glanced from Dutton to Geoffrey and back again before speaking.

"And if by chance," he began huskily; "one can never tell—if by chance it should be that? If Bridget, by some accident, should have taken poison?"

Dutton shrugged his shoulders roughly.

"Another of 'em," he cried. "Is the whole world going mad? Poison! Why, there isn't a single symptom of poisoning. No vomiting, for instance."

"But," said George, "I have heard that some poisons don't cause that symptom."

"There are certain vegetable distillations that may not," said Dutton—"belladonna for instance."

"Yes," cried George, "that's what I mean. Belladonna!"

"How the devil could the girl have swallowed bel-ladonna?" cried Dutton, testily. "That's not a drug to be lying about a farm, like arsenic. No, the cause is quite simple. It's a cerebral shock, induced possibly by malaria and temporary paralysis of the nerve centres. But why talk? I've done what I could. If Catherine Thorpe has the brains to trust me, I'll pull her sister through, if I can. If she lets that infernal old charlatan meddle he'll kill her to a certainty, and I shall wash my hands of the case."

He nodded to the two men, and strode away in the direction of Morris's farm.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SHADOW IN THE HOUSE.

I care not for the wintry blast  
That screams in my roof-tree,  
I let the tempests whistle past  
The walls that shelter me ;  
But when upon my own hearthstone  
No flame o' light I see,  
I turn my face to the wall, and moan  
That I forsaken be.—*The Shepherdess's Lament.*

SADLY and silently George and Geoffrey crossed the yard and entered the kitchen. Jasper was there, sitting by the window and smoking a short, battered briar-root pipe.

"Any news?" Geoffrey asked him.

"None yet awhile," said Jasper. "Miss Catherine's watching, and if there's any change she'll let me know. Ye needn't be afear'd, though. None of us poor creatures can answer for the will o' God, but so far as mortal wits can answer for aught, I'll answer for the little maid's life. Take heart, Master Jarge."

"Can I see her?" asked George. "Can I speak to her?"



"I think you'd better not now," said Geoffrey. "We seem to be at the very crisis of the case. The shock of seeing you might be too much for her, and——" He hesitated a moment, and then added, "Catherine is there."

"Catherine! What then?" asked George.

"Ask yourself, lad. It is better you shouldn't meet for the moment. Leave the rest to time, and be content with Jasper's assurance that there is hope."

"Ye may, Master Jarge," said Jasper. "Ye may. Bide here a minute, and maybe I'll have news for ye."

He laid his pipe on the table and left the kitchen.

"You're right," said George to Geoffrey, after a long minute's silence; "I've no right to remain in this house. Tell her from me, Geoffrey, that it is not my fault that we are separated; but that we must never meet again. 'Tis I who have already put her life in peril. Yes," he continued, in answer to a searching look on Geoffrey's face; "by turning love into hate I've almost brought about her death."

He turned to the window, and looked out blindly, unconscious of the look of strange meaning which Geoffrey bent upon him.

"*COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE.*" 241

A few minutes later Jasper re-entered the kitchen, so softly that they scarcely heard his step upon the floor.

"She 's saved !" cried the old man in a joyful whisper.

"Saved !" repeated George, turning swiftly on him.

"Ay, saved ! The corner 's turned. She 's lying asleep, like a child. Her skin 's as soft as silk, and her breathing like a new-born babe's. Ye can go home happy, Master Jarge."

There was more in his last words than met the ear. George crossed the room, and, speaking in a harsh dry whisper, said—

"You *knew* 'twas poison ?"

"Ay, and I guessed, too, who gave it. And, knowing that, I took care to gi'e the antidote and cleanse the poison out before yon bragging hodmedod could get nigh her wi' his science, as he calls it. Don't be afeard, my lad. Tell thy feyther I'll hold my tongue ; for if I spoke 'twould only breed more trouble and do no good to anybody."

George grasped his hand.

"God bless you, Shepherd !" was all he could say.  
"God bless you !"

"Ah, ay, lad!" said the old man, heartily returning the grip.

"Lord! Lord!" he said, with a laugh to Geoffrey. "How that vule Dutton will brag o' this cure! Well, he's welcome to it. 'Twill be a rare feather in his cap."

George crossed over to Geoffrey and took his hand.

"You'll see her, Geoffrey, soon. Give her my love—my love and blessing. Tell her, too, that I forgive Catherine for coming between us. But warn Bridget to take care—that hate may find her, even here. From this day forward I shall come no more. After what has passed, my heart sickens under this roof."

He bent his head, a great sob forced its way and shook his whole body with its violence. He passed his disengaged hand across his eyes, and, returning Geoffrey's sympathising pressure once more, withdrew the hand he held, and hurried from the house.

Jasper's news was true. From the moment of falling asleep after the administration of the Shepherd's antidote Bridget began to mend, and had she

no more to recover from than the Gaffer's poison might have risen from her bed whole and sound that evening.

It was the heart, not the body, that ailed now, which suffered by the poison of her sister's words as the body had done by the hellbroth the vile old man had administered in the teacherous draught.

Bridget lay like a bruised flower on which some careless or malignant foot had trodden, her vital force fighting hard and sternly against the wound, gaining a little every hour, not because she either hoped or cared to live, but by the pure strength of youth.

But as she grew slowly back to bodily health the estrangement between her and her sister deepened. Catherine had heard with a passion of silent joy Jasper's final assurance of her sister's recovery; silent joy, perforce, for the child was sleeping, and to have awakened her might have meant grave injury or even death. For the first hour or two after that news there was not a bitter thought in Catherine's heart. Even her passionate desire for George's love had been quenched for the moment by the dumb anguish of her fear for Bridget's life, the awful feeling, natural to her deep nature, that God had heard the wicked

words she had spoken, and was punishing her by granting her impious wish.

But, the shock of joy over, with the certainty of Bridget's continued life came the thought of all it meant!

Those few hours of bitter agony had chastened Catherine's nature to such a point that, had the choice been presented to her of laying down her life that her sister and rival might live and enjoy the happiness denied to her, she would have done so with scarce a struggle—nay, would have welcomed the moment of that crowning sacrifice. But the nature capable of such complete self-immolation required further chastening yet before it would let her *live* to witness her sister's triumph. The bitterness of hate was gone, but the sanctity of renewed and perfect affection was not yet born, and empty of hate and hope alike, her heart seemed barren of human feeling.

She performed the offices of the sick-room with a dead, mechanical regularity which Bridget found more bitter to bear than her sister's absence and neglect would have been.

Catherine's set face, which she sometimes forced to a pitiful smile, crushed her. A score of times a day, could she have found the courage, she would

have flung her arms about her sister's neck, and have blessed and thanked her with glad tears and kisses. One kindly touch of Catherine's hand, one mute look of the old, unclouded affection of which, so short a time ago, her eyes had been so full, would have melted the spell that bound her. But it never came.

With a bitter self-abasement, which was more remorse than repentance, Catherine ministered to her sister's needs, but the love which would have fallen on the tender, wounded heart like dew, the only medicine Bridget needed, was not yet hers to give.

Bridget was not to blame that under Catherine's unchanging mask of stony duty she could not read the struggle that was passing in her heart. Naturally, her honest mind, unconscious of any wilful wrong done to her sister, revolted against the cold injustice of Catherine's treatment.

"What right has she to be angry and unkind?" she asked herself with passionate reiteration. "Is it my fault that George loves me? Is it a sin for me to love George? If she had ever told me of her feelings towards him, I might have conquered mine for her sake, but she never gave a word or sign. It is unjust! It is cruel!"

And so, the two sisters, whose whole life history

till now had been a pure and beautiful devotion one to the other, were being swept apart, the gulf which separated them growing hourly deeper and wider. To Bridget, her convalescence—the prospect of life with neither the old affection nor the new love which might have replaced it—was a nightmare. There were moments when she longed intensely for death, and wondered, that, so longing she should yet continue to gain strength with every passing hour.

In the dead silence of the night, as she lay awake, fearing to stir lest the sound should bring that implacable figure of her sister to her bedside, she wept long and silently.

"Is it wicked to want to die? Is it wicked to pray to die?"

Her soul's desire flashed into words before she knew.

"Oh, God, let me die, if it be Thy will!"

Mr. Dutton, as the reader has probably discovered by himself by this time, was not likely to be reticent about any matter which he conceived likely to rebound to his own glory and importance, and he was very loud over his successful treatment of Bridget's case. It was a double triumph for him, for he had not merely, in his own belief, saved the girl's life,

but had scored a final and conspicuous victory over that presumptuous personal foe of science, Jasper the Shepherd.

Dutton was by no means an unkindly man, and though he would have taken the recommendation to silence regarding Jasper's diagnosis of the case in Catherine's presence more quietly if it had come from anybody but Jasper, he still respected it, and did not add to Catherine's troubles or his own triumph by speaking of it to her. But in the village alehouse, and in the rooms which his crony Marsh occupied over the saddler's shop, he was loud in derision of the silly old quack.

His idea of conversational style at inspired moments was to cram into any given sentence as many polysyllables as it could be expected to hold without bursting, and his talk was listened to with awestruck respect by his simple audience.

"Is it not incredible, gentlemen," he would ask of the respectfully attentive knot of listeners at the Queen and Crown—"is it not incredible that at this epoch of unprecedented scientific activity, at this apex, I may say, of our vaunted civilisation, an individual like Miss Catherine Thorpe, a territorial proprietress, a woman of wealth and education, should



encourage the superstitious devices of a rural quack-salver? But for me, but for my promptitude and firmness in vindicating the science of which I am an unworthy exponent, Miss Bridget must have inevitably succumbed to the malpractices of that old charlatan. Of his insolence to me personally I say nothing. I can, I hope, afford to pass it over in the contemptuous silence it merits. But when I consider that through the supineness and indolence of the legal authorities of this neighbourhood the lives of our fellow-citizens, of her Majesty's liege subjects, gentlemen, are liable to be juggled away by the mumbo-jumbo of an uninstructed yokel, who presumptuously dares to tamper with the mysteries of my craft, I feel that the occasion demands legislative interference. Are there, or are there not, laws constituted by her Majesty's legislative assemblies for the repression and punishment of illegal medical practitioners? There are! And in my opinion there should be also laws to visit with condign punishment those individuals who encourage and employ such impostors, to the detriment of society and of the public health."

He dramatised his battle with Jasper, and, after one or two recitals of it, polished his retorts to the impudent assumptions of that old pretender to such a

polysyllabic perfection that the Shepherd's continued existence seemed a wonder.

Marsh said that a man who could talk like that ought to be in Parliament. Dutton, in his own style of oratory, made it clear that he thought he had for ever made it impossible for the most ignorant of Jasper's clients to believe in him any more.

The case of Miss Thorpe had been one of life or death. Even he had been puzzled by the symptoms. Many doctors—men as well read as himself in the mysteries of medicine, but lacking his courage and decision—might have lost the patient by hesitation. He had acted with promptitude, and there was Miss Bridget Thorpe, alive and recovering.

From the first administration of his antispasmodic she had turned the corner. Had he not been by, that old quack would have poured into the poor young lady's system some detestable concoction as an antidote for poison. Poison, quotha! It was lucky for the old ass that he had not been permitted to meddle. He would have killed the patient, gentlemen, and then—why, then, it might have been a hanging job for *him*!

Geoffrey Doone, drinking his sober glass of ale before going to his solitary cottage, heard Dutton's

250 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

voice booming away in the bar-parlour, interrupted every now and then by Marsh's cackling tones.

"The prating idiot!" he muttered to himself: "if he guessed what he was doing, even *he* would hold his bragging tongue. It 'll be all over the place now that Jasper suspected poison, and then—there's no saying what a crowd of ignorant gossips might think or say."

He stood with his half-emptied glass in his hand, staring before him with knitted brows.

"Plain speech is best, nine cases out of ten," he said half aloud: "I 'll go and see her now. She 'd better learn it from me than from the public talk."

He set the glass upon the table, and, walking out of the inn, made his way through the deserted lanes to the farm.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE LAST BLOW.

When all the world hath turned away,  
And dulness clouds the sky and air,  
If thou, O love, wilt be my stay,  
There is no woe I will not bear !  
O love, sweet love, remain awhile  
Here in these shadows where I fare,  
Cheered by thy presence and thy smile,  
I'll sing aloud without a care !  
But wing away and leave me here,  
Who then shall comfort my despair?  
To lose thee, love, and linger on,  
Is the one woe I cannot bear.—*Sir Thomas Sutton.*

GEOFFREY had started at a round pace for the farm, but before he had covered half the ground his speed slackened and his walk became slow and uncertain.

Dutton's braggart talk had revived and given form to a fear which had been tormenting him ever since George's appearance on the previous morning. The words George had used : "'Tis *I* who have put her life in peril. By turning love into hate, I have almost brought about her death," had been constantly in his mind. Combined with the news of Catherine's

visit to the sheepfold (he had been afraid to ask George if *he* had learned that circumstance from his father) and with Jasper's positive assertion that Bridget was suffering from the effects of poison, the words had seemed to Geoffrey to intimate on George's part so horrible a suspicion of Catherine that he wondered how any man, even so distraught with grief as George was at Bridget's danger and suffering, could entertain it.

From an open enemy, or from one merely indifferent, the accusation would have been sufficiently terrible, but from George, the man whom Catherine loved—Geoffrey's heart sank within him as he thought of making the truth known to her. If Dutton had only held his tongue about Jasper's reading of the case, there would have been no need to speak; Bridget's recovery would have covered everything. But now the Shepherd's suspicion—which Geoffrey, we must remember, knew to be a certainty—would be all over the village in a few hours. The floodgates of tattle once opened, there was no knowing what might ensue.

"She must be told," said Geoffrey. "She must be put on her guard. I'd rather cut off my right hand than do it, but it's got to be done."

He resumed his rapid walk, and arriving at the farm, went straight to the kitchen-door, and knocked. Receiving no answer to his summons, he opened the door and looked in. Catherine was sitting with her back towards him staring into the fading fire, whose dying flicker was the only light in the room.

She did not hear his entrance, and he was almost at her side before the sound of his step roused her from the trance of thought in which she was plunged. She started with a quick and sudden tremor, and called his name.

"Yes," he said; "'tis I, Miss Catherine."

"You startled me. I—I was thinking."

"I knocked," said Geoffrey.

"I didn't hear you!" she said, and rising, began to busy herself in lighting the lamp and arranging the articles on the dresser. Geoffrey followed her motions, debating in his mind how best to begin what he had to say, until the silence became unendurable.

At last he cleared his throat, and spoke in the most commonplace tone he could assume.

"So the danger's over, Catherine, and the little one is pulling round."

"Yes," said Catherine. "She'll be about in a little while now."

She spoke wearily, as if of a subject which had no particular interest for her or any one.

"It must be a great relief to you. You must be very glad."

"I—I suppose so. Yes, very glad," said Catherine, in the same hollow and uninterested tone. "She has come round as quickly as she ailed. I don't know what can have been the matter with her. I asked Jasper, but he seemed to avoid the question."

Geoffrey's heart jumped. She had herself approached the subject he had meant to speak of. It was his opportunity, but he somehow could not force himself to speak, and meanwhile Catherine went on.

"I've helped her to dress, and placed her in the arm-chair by the window of her room."

"Why are you not with her?" asked Geoffrey.

"Because she doesn't need me. She doesn't *want* me."

"Has she said so?"

"Said so?" answered Catherine, with a dreary half-laugh. "She has said nothing. She *looks*; that's all. When I'm with her, her eyes follow me all about the room, and when I look at her, or speak to her, they fill with tears. We're best apart. When she wants any-

thing she will call me. I'll go to her, but—I can't sit with her alone."

"Why not?" asked Geoffrey.

"Because I can't," answered Catherine, and the woman's reason for once seemed sufficient. "I can't bear to be with her," she added, sitting at the table and letting her head fall between her hands. "It's like being with a corpse. If she'd cry or reproach me, or curse me as I cursed her the other night, I could bear it better than her silence. It kills me. It drives me mad. There are moments when I think *I am* mad."

Her bent figure, the trembling hands which clutched the heavy coils of her loosened hair, the hollow and monotonous voice, were all eloquent of despair.

Geoffrey looked at her with an infinite pity in his rugged face. There was silence between them for a time, till Catherine, raising her face with a long, tremulous sigh, met her companion's gaze.

"What's the matter?" she asked, half angrily resenting the compassion she read in it. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Because I'm troubled on your account, Catherine."

"And why on my account?" she demanded.

He did not answer immediately, but stood looking



down at his intertwined fingers and gnawing his lower lip.

"Why on my account?" she asked again.

"I think you know," he said slowly and with difficulty. "I think you know, Catherine, that I would serve you if I could—that I'm your friend?"

"Yes," she answered, with a momentary recurrence of something like her old familiar manner; "I know that, Geoffrey—the best and truest in the world. I've never doubted that. I never shall, I hope, whatever else I come to doubt."

"That's good to hear," said Geoffrey, simply. "It helps me to speak."

All the same there was a pause of some seconds before he opened his lips again.

"There's something on my mind I want to tell you, Catherine. I *must* tell you, though it chokes me in the saying."

"Well, Geoffrey, what is it?"

For the moment her faithful servant's personal trouble drew Catherine from the dull, uninterested mood into which she had fallen.

"Speak out, please. It isn't like you to be afraid to speak your mind, especially to me."

"I'd rather cut my tongue out than tell you," he

groaned. "But you'd better hear it from me than from other people, perhaps from—well, it's *this*. I've been having a glass of beer at the Queen and Crown, and I heard Dutton talking about Miss Bridget's sickness and saying how he 'd cured her and kept old Jasper from meddling with the case. Now, we know—you and I—that it was not Dutton who saved her, but Jasper."

"Well," said Catherine, wonderingly; "what's coming of all this?"

"If you 'll wait a minute you 'll see," answered Geoffrey. "'Tain't so easy to explain. You say you asked Jasper to tell you what ailed the child!"

"Yes."

"And he wouldn't give you a straight answer?"

"No. He avoided the question. His manner was very strange."

"Well," said Geoffrey, more uncomfortably than ever, "he told *me*, and he asked me to keep quiet about it, and so I should have done, only——"

"Well, well!" cried Catherine. "Why don't you speak? Don't you see how you are torturing me?"

"Well, then, in a word," said Geoffrey screwing

his courage to the sticking point with a mighty effort, "what ailed the lass was this—she'd taken some deadly poison."

Catherine's breath escaped in a quick pant. The word seemed to have stabbed her like a knife.

"*Poison!*" she repeated at last in a faint whisper. "Impossible!"

"No," said Geoffrey, "it isn't impossible—it's true! Jasper treated her for poison, and saved her life, so poison it must have been. Now," he continued, "I want to ask you a question?"

Catherine's eyes dwelt on his face with an unchanging look of horror. She nodded slightly, but could find no word to speak.

"Did you go, the night before last, up to the sheepfold on the Weald to speak with Jasper?"

"If I did," asked Catherine, "what then?"

"Why did you go there?"

"Whose business is that but mine?" asked Catherine.

"It concerns us all," said Geoffrey, "for your sake. Jasper knows the plants that cure sickness in man and beast. He knows, too, the plants which breed poison and cause death. If I had a sick beast I wished to kill without pain, I should go to Jasper.



"POISON!" SHE REPEATED AT LAST IN A FAINT WHISPER.

—Page 258.



If I had an enemy I hated, or saw somebody standing between me and my heart's desire, I might, if the devil put the thought into my head, go to the same man."

"My God!" cried Catherine, staggering to her seat. "What do you mean?"

"It's not my thought, Catherine. Lord forbid that such a thought should ever enter my mind. But George Kingsley has been here. He knows that Bridget has been almost done to death by poison. Put these things together, Miss Catherine, and think what folks may say, Your visit to the Weald the night before last, the little one's sickness next morning—a sickness which only Jasper knew how to cure—and then George's last words to me, that his heart sickened beneath this roof. I can hear his voice now," Geoffrey continued: "'Tell Bridget from me it is not my fault we are separated, but that we must never meet again. 'Tis I who have already put her life in peril. By turning love into hate I've almost brought about her death.' Those were *his* words, Catherine, George Kingsley's words."

Catherine had risen from her seat.

"*He* said that!" she cried. "George? He suspected *me*—accused me of poisoning my sister?"

"Not in words, poor lad," said Geoffrey, "but I fear he thinks ——"

"And you?" she cried fiercely. "You? What do you think, Geoffrey Doone?"

"I'd stake my life that it's a lie! No," he cried, as she opened her lips to speak again, "I want no denial. D'ye think I need any? The thing 's a lie on the face of it—a lie as black as hell. I spoke to warn you, to put you on your guard. The accusation must be met, if it is made, and it may be. The Gaffer saw you at the sheepfold. I fear—I fear that George suspects you, and that fool Dutton is talking of Jasper saying Bridget had been poisoned. It's like a trail of gunpowder that any stray spark may fire. Your estrangement from Bridget, too, would give it colour with folk who like to think evil, and God knows there's no lack of such. I would have spared you if I could," he continued miserably; "but I had to speak. If it hits you so hard coming from me, who knows that you're innocent, think what it would have been if you had felt it whispered about you, the country talk, the scandal growing, then reaching the little one's ears, and turning her whole heart against you!"

Catherine had sunk to her seat again, her arms lay

lax on the table in front of her, her eyes vacant, her face as pale as ashes.

"Come, come, Catherine!" cried Geoffrey, taking her hand: "Bear a brave heart. Don't let it break you down. It's a time for strength, not for weakness. You love the little lass. Take her back to your heart again, and let the world see it. What's a silly lying rumour like this, against all your life of love and devotion, that has made you a proverb over the country-side for all that's good and kind?"

Catherine took no heed of his voice or of the touch of his hand. She seemed neither to hear nor to feel. The blow had been too heavy, brain and heart were crushed by it for the moment. Her dumb, vacant stare frightened Geoffrey, and wrung his heart with an unspeakable anguish.

"Don't think any harder of the lad than you can help, Catherine," he said, with a tremor in his voice.

His whole honest heart was filled with pity for the suffering of the woman he loved, and he bent himself to the task of defending the man she had preferred to him. He was eager to do this, simply and gladly, if thereby he might by a straw's weight reduce her burden.



"He loves the little lass. 'Tis not in our control to love or stop loving. It might be happier for some of us if 'twas different," he continued, with a patient sigh; "but it isn't. Love comes and goes as the wind shakes the wheat—as God wills it, I suppose. George knows of your quarrel with her, and I suppose the Gaffer told him of seeing you at the sheepfold. It's an awful thought to have against you, but the lad's mad with love, and he's not responsible. He'll come to see how wrong and wicked such a thought is. He'll repent and make amends for it."

Still Catherine neither moved nor spoke, but sat staring vacantly at him, with a set look of horror and despair which chilled his blood, and the thought flashed across his mind that the shock had unhinged her reason.

"You're overset," he said, going to the dresser and pouring out of glass of water from a jug there. "Here, drink this, Miss Catherine."

He held it to her lips, but by this time she was breathing so rapidly that she could not have drunk, even had she been conscious of his well-intended assistance. Suddenly she rose with a convulsed face, an expression he had never seen there before, and began to pace about the kitchen; her breathing be-

came stertorous and was interrupted by loud, rending sobs.

A man more accustomed to the ways of women than was Geoffrey would have understood the crisis, but he was helpless, and could only follow her, entreating her to be calm. She seemed neither to see nor to hear him.

The sobs became moans, the moans shrieks, and with a wild clutch at the air she fell to the floor, crying so that the house rang with her voice. Hurried footsteps and the voices of frightened women were heard, and Amanda and another girl burst into the room.

"It's hysterics!" cried Amanda. "Get some water; loosen her dress; and you, that be a man," she continued to Geoffrey, "go thy ways and let her be, a poor suffering lamb."

Poor Geoffrey, thoroughly bewildered, went out into the open air, with a dim sense of having seen Bridget's frightened face peering from the staircase door. Catherine's shrieks rang in his ears for half an hour afterwards, and it was not till they ceased that he dared to knock timidly at the kitchen door and ask for news of her.

She was better, Amanda said. Should he go for

264 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

the doctor? No. She would not have the doctor. Miss Bridget was with her. She seemed like a mad thing, kissing Miss Bridget and crying over her.

"Whatever have you been a saying to her, Mr. Doone, to upset her in this wise?" asked the servant.

"That I can't tell you," said Geoffrey. "I'll call and see how she is in the morning," and so went home, as unhappy a man as any in England.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A PEEP OF SUNSHINE.

Sweet is sunshine thro' the rain,  
All the moist leaves laugh amain,  
Birds sing in the wood and lane  
    To see the storm go by, O!  
Overhead the lift grows blue,  
Hill and valley smile anew,  
Rainbows fill each drop of dew,  
    And a rainbow spans the sky, O!

*The Shepherd's Calendar.*

THE emotional crisis produced in Catherine's nature by Geoffrey's communication was terrible, and its manifestation in the form of an hysteric fit frightened the whole household to a quite disproportionate extent.

To a normally constituted woman tears come easily, and are as easily dried. Each emotion, as it touches her, provokes its own fitting expression and passes, leaving little or no trace. With Catherine it was otherwise. There was an idea abroad about her, as there generally is among the acquaintances

of self-repressive people who have the art of concealing their emotions, that her nature was too hard and unfeminine to permit her to feel very deeply on any subject. We, who have followed the history of the crucial period of her life thus far, know how shallow that judgment was.

Still waters are not always the deepest, and a good many people have earned the reputation for heroic repression of emotion by the simple means of having no emotion to repress. Catherine's nature was as far removed from that extreme of insensibility as it was from the opposing extreme of sentimentality. She felt deeply and suffered keenly, and as her pride held her from indulging freely in the manifestations of emotion which come so easily to her sex in general, she had been all her life creating, so to speak, a reserve fund of tears, which now, when the depths of her nature were opened, burst with a fury which both astonished and alarmed. The grief of such a woman, when it once conquers her, is, compared with that of a more easily moved nature, as a tropical thunderstorm compared with an April shower. Had Catherine passed dry-eyed through the fire which Geoffrey's words had lit, her reason, perhaps her life, might have been lost.

Pitifully and wonderingly they bore her, when the first terrible stage of her hysteria was passed, to her chamber, and laid her on the bed. She lay there with her eyes fast shut, but between the hard-set lids the tears ran freely. All that she seemed conscious of now was the presence of Bridget, and she clung to her with a hard, unconscious grip. The younger sister, divining that whatever had happened to explain Catherine's condition, it was something germane to the affair which had already revolutionised their relations, sat beside her in silent pity and expectation, wiping the salt tears from her own pale cheeks, while Amanda and the other servants cackled and whispered with wonder and terror about the room.

"She is better now," said Bridget. "You had better go and leave us. I can do all that will be required."

The girls would have lingered, but could find no pretext, and unwillingly retired. Catherine took no heed of their going, but lay still, the tears pouring in an unceasing stream from under her dark lashes and her body tremulous with her sobbing breath.

"What is it, Catherine?" asked Bridget, bending

over her. "What is it? Won't you tell me? You know me, dear, don't you?" she asked, after waiting for a reply. "You know your sister?"

A strong pressure of Catherine's hand was the only response.

"Tell me what it is. What has Geoffrey said to you?"

The tears ran on, but no answer followed. Bridget, with a patient sigh, slid her arm beneath her sister's neck. At that Catherine moved to the edge of the bed, and threw her arm suddenly about her waist. Little by little, Bridget felt the tense muscles slacken; the tears ran more slowly, the breath quieted at every inhalation, and in a little time Catherine lay sleeping in her sister's arms. The strong woman, broken by her storm of emotion, slept like a tired child on the bosom of the frail girl she had cherished.

A deep and solemn gladness filled Bridget's heart. She knew not why, but the pall of trouble which had enfolded her life seemed to have slipped away.

"She loves me—my sister loves me again!" she murmured to herself. "She knew me, she knew it was my arm on which she lay."







Not even a thought of George troubled her. He was somewhere in the background of her mind, but the tranquil joy of having reconquered the old affection which had been the main part of her life, banished all thought of the trouble which the new love had brought.

Tenderly as a mother might caress the face of a sleeping babe, she touched Catherine's wet cheek with her lips. Catherine's grasp of her tightened ever so little, as though the happy sense of their reunion was present with her even in her sleep.

It was grey morning when Catherine awoke to find herself still in Bridget's arms. For a moment she looked about the room with the dazed stare of the sleeper who awakens amid unfamiliar circumstances, then a long, deep sigh showed that she remembered the events of the preceding night.

"Ah, little sister," she cried, drawing Bridget closer to her. "You have been here all night, watching over me!"

"You are better now?" asked Bridget.

"Yes," said Catherine. "I am better now. How much better! Bridget, I have to ask your pardon for those wicked words. Yes, I *must*," she continued, as Bridget strove to prevent her speaking. "I must.

They have been heavy on my heart ever since I spoke them. They have brought their punishment. Forgive me, dear! I was mad and wicked."

"You never meant them, darling," said Bridget. "Let us forget them. We are together now, as we used to be, and we will go on loving each other, and living for each other, as we did, and think nothing of other people any more."

In the first flush of her reconciliation with Catherine, the sacrifice implied in the last words—renunciation of George—looked almost easy. Catherine kissed her with a sad smile.

"You must be very tired with watching me all night," she said. "Go to your room, dear, and try to sleep. You need not be afraid of leaving me, I want to be alone. But kiss me again first."

They parted after a long embrace, and Catherine, rising from the bed, paced quietly about her chamber in the broadening light.

The night of passion and despair was over. Calm and pure as the morning radiance, flooding field and sky, the dawn of a purer love had arisen in her soul. She felt strangely strong and peaceful—a creature renewed, and when, after a few minutes passed on her knees at her bedside, she descended, there was

a tranquil happiness upon her face, which astonished all who had seen her on the previous night.

Her first inquiry was for Geoffrey. He had called an hour before, and, learning that she was still asleep, had gone, promising to come again, after his morning tour of the farm.

She went through the tasks of the hour in her old, accustomed fashion, and when the time for Geoffrey's second coming was near, went and awakened Bridget. Geoffrey was in the kitchen when they entered.

Catherine greeted him with her ordinary manner, and, saying simply, "Bridget and I want to speak to you," led the way to the parlour.

"You asked me last night," she said to her sister, "what Geoffrey had said to me that had overcome me so. I am going to tell you, dear. You must be brave, for what I am going to tell you is terrible. Somebody has tried to kill you—to *poison* you, my child!"

"Catherine!" cried Bridget, in a voice of horrified surprise.

"And do you know who they say has done so? Do you know who is thought guilty of planning your death? Me!—your sister!"

Bridget stood for a moment as if frozen, and then,

with a cry, threw her arms round Catherine, and broke into tears.

"You see," said Catherine to Geoffrey, "she knows it couldn't be!"

"Know it!" cried Bridget, in a voice broken with sobs. "Whoever said it?—whoever thought of such a wicked thing? My darling! My own dear Catherine! The sister who has reared me, loved me, cherished me! Oh! shameful! cruel!" She kissed her sister passionately. "Oh, don't think I believe it, dear!—don't, or it will kill me!"

"It's worth all the trouble you've gone through," said Geoffrey, "to see you together again like this. This is why I told you, Catherine. I knew you had only to hear of such a foul suspicion to prove to the whole world that it was impossible."

"Thank you, my friend," said Catherine, simply.

"But," cried Bridget, "*someone* wished my death! Someone!"

"No one, no one," said Catherine, interrupting her, and tenderly smoothing her hair. "No one wished it, so don't talk of it. It's all a mistake. It has had its uses. It has brought us together again, little one. Let us forget it."

"But why did they speak of poison?" cried Bridget.

"Why did they suspect you? Ah!" she cried with a sudden inspiration, "I know—because of George!"

Catherine tried to speak, but Bridget stayed her mouth with her hand.

"No, no; don't speak yet. They think George came between us. They think we hate each other enough for a crime like that! And if you had been ill and dying they might have thought the same of *me*. Shame on them! Shame! But we'll silence them, dear; we'll stop their wicked tongues. We'll prove to them we are not so evil as they think us. We'll show them what we are to one another. You love George—you shall marry him."

"Bridget!" cried Catherine; "what are you saying? You would give him up to me?"

"You've given up all else in the world for my sake. You've given me all—your love, your life. You've lived for me; it's my turn now," she cried tenderly, hiding her flushing face on Catherine's neck. "It's my turn now."

Catherine looked to Geoffrey with a sad and pitying smile, in which there was a touch of motherly triumph.

"And yet," she murmured, touched to the soul by

the wild, childish generosity; "and yet you love him."

"No, no," cried Bridget, impetuously; "at least, I can forget him; I can live without him."

"Could you ever do that, little one?" asked Catherine.

"Ye-es," sobbed Bridget. "I would try. I must! I will!"

"But what would George say to that arrangement?" asked Catherine, with a tender half-laugh in her voice. "I am afraid we must give him a say in the matter, and he might not like to be handed over in that way."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried Bridget, in a distress which might have had its comic side to a disinterested spectator of the scene.

"No, no," said Catherine. "You're too weak, my darling—too like a tender flower. You'd droop and die without George's love. But you shall not. No. I'll prove to you that I want you to live."

"But you—you?" began Bridget. "Oh, it's shameful—I can do nothing—give nothing, and you have given me all. I won't! I won't marry George! I'd rather die!"

"Hush, dear! hush! and let me speak," said

Catherine. "It was just madness and folly on my part; it was bound to have 'an end. Yes, 'twas only a day's shadow on our lives, and it's past and gone. I thought I loved George—I thought he might have learned to love me. A fine affair that! He is only a lad, and I—how the people would have laughed to see a silly old woman like me—no, no, little one, I was mad and God has brought me back my reason. It's you, not I, that must be George's wife!"

She spoke lightly, with a fond laughter in her eyes, and Geoffrey, watching the scene, marvelled within himself. Was it genuine, or only the most consummate acting? Whichever it was, it was wonderful.

"And now," she continued, "all that we have to do is to call in the happy man and name the day, and set the bells a-ringing. Not a word, little one. It shall be as I say. You shall marry your own true love, and soon, soon! You won't forget me in your happiness, will you, dear? You'll remember the cross, grumpy sister, and come and let her see you sometimes, won't you? Nay, nay, dear, you mustn't cry yourself ill again. We'll forget all our troubles. There'll be nothing but sunshine and



merrymaking now. A wedding-dress for my little sister, a wedding ring!"

She broke out into laughter which had in it a touch of the hysteria of the previous night. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled.

"Won't we have the laugh of them all! Won't we have grand times, dear, here at the old farm!"

"But, Catherine! Catherine!" cried Bridget. "It's impossible. Even if you are willing, how can I marry George? That dreadful old man will cast him off. He'll be ruined."

"What? the Gaffer?" said Catherine. "Don't fret yourself about him, Bridget. I know the music to make him dance at your wedding. Trust me, Bridget, *he* won't stand in your way. Come, Geoffrey, won't George and Bridget make a pretty pair!"

"Ay, indeed," said Geoffrey, turning aside to hide his emotion.

"And I know a man," said Catherine, reaching out her hand to him, "who'll be glad to be their groomsman. A bit tough and grizzled like myself, eh, Geoffrey?" she laughed again. "Till then I warn you to take care of Bridget, for fear I ill-use her and try to do her harm!"

**"COME. LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE." 277**

She kissed the girl again with a passionate cry.

"Go, Geoffrey! Leave us now. Thank you, my true friend, for speaking as you did last night. It isn't the first service you've rendered me, not by many, but it's the greatest of all, and I shan't forget it!"

Geoffrey took her hand again, and, silently pressing it, walked from the room, leaving the reunited sisters in each other's arms.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### JASPER PLAYS THE PEACEMAKER.

The wind blows chill in my roof-tree,  
 The rain is falling dreary, O!  
 There's storm between my love and me,  
 And I wake and weep full weary, O!  
 My curse be on the wind and rain,  
 And on this wintry weather, O!  
 For where's the hand can heal my pain,  
 And bring the sunshine back again  
 To shine on us together, O?—*The Rainy Day.*

Quite unconsciously, and without the faintest attempt to calculate results, Geoffrey had adopted the one mode of treatment which could possibly have cured Catherine's infatuation.

By telling her in good set terms that George Kingsley thought her capable of planning and attempting Bridget's death (although, as the reader is aware, Geoffrey was mistaken on this point, and George thought nothing of the kind) he turned her wounded vanity into vigorous indignation. Had she been a woman of less noble nature the result might have been different. "Hell has no fury like a woman

scorned," says the poet. But Catherine's furious mood was long past. Scorn, like a powerful cautery, destroyed the last traces of morbid disease, and restored the balance of the strong woman's healthy animalism. From that moment Catherine was determined, at any suffering and at any cost, to rise superior to what she at last recognised as an unworthy passion.

It was now, as it seemed to her, Bridget and herself *contra mundum*; even Geoffrey was left out of count, as a sort of sympathetic looker-on.

The little sister was a child again, to be protected, to be clasped close, to be tended with endless offices of love. All the world should see that no evil power could part those twain. George especially even should see it. He should be shamed by his own suspicion, and humiliated by the spectacle of their devotion.

The thought of what George had thought and done was the bitterest thing which this proud woman had to bear, but it had come to save her against herself and to turn her yearning love to absolute repulsion. Sometimes, as it passed through her mind, the young man, with his youthful face, and quiet, winning ways, grew positively hateful to her. But she remembered

that he was the light of the little sister's life, and crushed the hatred down.

Three days after that memorable reconciliation, when Bridget was out of all danger and had recovered a little of her old lightness, Catherine sent a secret message to George Kingsley, asking him to come over and speak to her. Not without a terrible struggle with her own pride did she determine on that course, but her strength of will prevailed. George replied by the same messenger that he could not come. Her mind was at once made up. She determined to go to him and have an explanation face to face.

It was late in the evening. Bridget having already retired to rest, Catherine was alone in the great kitchen. All the day she had worn a mask of mirth, had been as busy as a bee, and had convinced her sister, for the twentieth time that she was making no sacrifice. But left to herself, Catherine underwent a transformation. The crisis of her pain had come; she had to meet the man who had almost broken her heart; and for a time she sat in agony, her eyes full of bitter tears.

At last, when it was quite dark and still, she threw on her cloak and went to the door. It had been a chill, drizzly day, and the rain was still falling; but

without a thought of anything but her errand, she slipped out, closed the door softly behind her, and made her way through the darkness to the Warren Farm.

At the very time that Catherine was sitting alone, struggling with that great agony, Gaffer Kingsley was also sitting alone in his own chair at the farm. His books of accounts were open before him, and he was turning them over with trembling fingers; but his look was abstracted, and his thoughts seemed wandering elsewhere. One solitary candle, in a tin candlestick, guttered on the table before him. The slightest sound from without or within made him start and look round nervously, and from time to time he mopped the perspiration from his wrinkled brow.

For days past he and George had scarcely exchanged a word. He knew, however, that his son was making preparations to leave home. When their eyes met, the Gaffer turned his away, for his spirit seemed entirely broken, and all his power of vituperation had forsaken him for ever.

It would be difficult to say how far this change of mood and temper came from shame at his own rascality, and how far from the moral paralysis con-

sequent on the utter failure of his plans. He could not have enlightened you himself, for he did not know. He was "nervous," he thought; unaccountably nervous and out of sorts. His relish for life seemed gone, and in the slow intellectual process of his small brain, where instinct was far stronger than reason, he was chiefly conscious of a dim animal-like dread.

He was afraid of George, afraid of every stranger he encountered, afraid of his own shadow, so to speak, and afraid in the manner of a spiteful but well-whipped hound, rather than that of a reasoning human being. He knew, vacantly, that although Bridget lived, and he had been spared the guilt of murder, the end of his misdeed had not yet come. But what was yet to happen, he could not tell.

He was sitting in weary abstraction, when the door opened, and the man whom of all men living he most dreaded walked leisurely in. Not recognising him at first, but full of his own fears, he uttered a cry, and gripped the stick which ever lay to his hand; but the next moment, perceiving that his visitor was Jasper the shepherd, he fell back in his chair open-mouthed.

For at least a minute Jasper uttered no word, but,

leaning on his crook, stood looking hard into the face of the old man ; then nodding a greeting, he bent forward and snuffed the guttering "dip" with his fingers.

"There's a shroud i' the candle!" he observed.  
"Facing *your* way, Gaffer!"

The Gaffer drew a deep breath ; then, looking at the speaker, his eyes contracted like those of a snake. He tried to speak, but his lips and tongue were dry as sand, and the sounds battled in his throat.

"A long, white, shinin' shroud!" continued his tormentor, with a grim smile. "D' ye know what that means, *you*?"

The tone of sharp contempt in which the words were spoken acted like the prick of a needle, and brought the Gaffer to himself. His thin bony hand felt again for the weapon of defence, and his face became fierce and ugly as that of some hunted beast of prey.

"What brings 'ee hereaway?" he articulated at last.

Without replying, the Shepherd took a chair, sat down right opposite to the Gaffer, and renewed his long and searching gaze. This was more than irritable flesh and blood could bear. With a little scream



of rage, the Gaffer grasped his stick, and aimed a feeble blow at the other's head; but the blow fell short, and the stick dropped from the lax and trembling hand, while Jasper sat stern and unconcerned.

"Where's Mr. Jarge?" demanded the Shepherd.

"Don't know and don't care!" was the reply.

"Out of my house, *you*!"

Though the words were decisive, the tone was feeble and even timorous.

"Was it my son Jarge ye came to see?" the Gaffer added, suspiciously.

"No son o' yourn!" said the Shepherd, sternly.

"Better begotten and better bred, ye black-hearted miserable old man. So! Ye wanted poison, did 'ee, to rid yourself of a poor hound that troubled 'ee? 'Twere no hound—'twere a living woman!"

The old man's face went livid, his jaw dropped, his eyes sank in his head, but, conquering his terror, he gasped—

"Wheesht! Speak low! Some one 'll hear 'ee!"

"And if they do?" continued the Shepherd. "If I call out loud and call folk to witness ye deserve to hang. Down on your knees—pray the Lord to forgive 'ee! Thank the Lord I was by to save the poor wench ye tried to kill!"

Desperate with terror, the Gaffer half sprang up in his chair, and shook his skinny hands before him.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "Ye can prove nowt! I tell 'ee it's a lie! Bridget's living!"

"Ay, thanks to me, tho' she drank the ugly broth ye gave her. She's living, but does *that* make your guilt less, Gaffer Kingsley? Ye *tried* to kill her, and the Lord 'll punish 'ee all the same!"

The Gaffer, his last power of fight gone, fell back awed and terrified before the pitiless eyes of his accuser. Huddled up in his chair, he gasped and groaned and fought for breath. Then, rising quietly, the Shepherd placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"Confess, ye Cain, or I'll call them that shall make 'ee!"

"Shepherd, Shepherd!" moaned the Gaffer, clutching the outstretched arm. "Hold your peace, and it 'll be worth your while. Don't 'ee, don't 'ee talk like that! I be an old man, wi' only a short while to live—and maybe I'll make amends."

Jasper waited until the paroxysm of supplication had subsided, then he spoke again—

"Listen to me, Gaffer. Only me and your son Jarge knows o' this—even yon doctor vule has ne'er a guess o' what ailed the little one." (The Gaffer

pricked up his ears.) "Well, kneel down and swear to dower Mr. Jarge wi' the Warren Farm the day he weds Miss Bridget, and I'll save 'ee from ending your days in jail or maybe worse."

"I'll promise nowt!" said the Gaffer, now fully on the alert. "Catherine has the money—the lands jine——"

"Make your ch'ice!" cried Jasper. "Swear to do as I've bidden 'ee, or I'll speak out!"

Their eyes met. Jasper's were still stern and determined, and it was clear that there was no mercy there; but the Gaffer's were again keen and quick and full of life. The hunted fox already saw a gleam of safety. No one knew the secret, except Jasper and George. George, of course, would be silent, for very shame, and Jasper—well, Jasper, he knew, loved money, and might have his price.

"Gi'e me time!" the Gaffer murmured. "Sit down, sit down, and talk it o'er." He added, with a feeble attempt to seem hospitable and friendly, "Will 'ee take a sup o' something, Shepherd? A mug o' old ale?"

"Not a drop in *this* house," returned Jasper, with another of his grim smiles; "tho' the man don't live as could poison *me*." As he spoke he sat down, add-

ing, "There be only one way out o' it—gi'e up the farm, and dower your son."

"And what's to become o' *me*?" demanded the Gaffer, sharply, with a flash of his old savage humour. "Shall I go down to the workhouse, and ask 'em to lodge me thereaway?"

"Ye may go down to hell-fire, if ye please," returned the other drily. "It'll be no consarn o' mine where ye go or what ye do; but ye'll ha' to put wrong right, and do justice to her ye wrong'd and tried to kill. She's to marry Mr. Jarge, mind that!"

The Gaffer mused, gazing vacantly at the shroud in the candle; then, with a little of his old tremor, he bent forward, and detaching the ominous tallow with his fingers threw it into the fireplace.

"Well?" said Jasper, watching him.

"Jarge and me don't speak now!" was the evasive reply.

Jasper nodded approvingly.

"Jarge is a good lad, and no wonder his soul's sick to ha' such a father. But he'll see right done, tho' his father were to hang, as maybe he will, some day."

If looks could have killed, the Shepherd would have had short shrift, so dire and murderous was

the other's expression ; but the Gaffer, who was beginning to recover a certain amount of composure, forced his face into a puckered grin as he said—

"Ye 'll ha' your joke, Shepherd, come what will. But, as I was a-saying, Jarge and me don't speak, and I doubt he 'll be leaving home for good."

The words had scarcely left his lips when the door again opened, and George Kingsley himself appeared, looking as haggard and worn as a love-sick and love-tormented young man could be. He started on seeing the Shepherd, and seemed about to withdraw.

"Don't go away, Mr. Jarge," said Jasper. "Your father and me ha' been talking about 'ee, and I be glad you're come."

Without answering, George looked at his father, who averted his eyes. Jasper continued—

"Happen you 'll still be anger'd wi' the old man for that wicked deed only you and me knows on ; but the Lord has laid a finger on that black heart o' his'n, and he seeks to make amends. Now bide a bit," he continued, in answer to an angry and impatient gesture from George ; "bide a bit, and hearken to what I be goin' to say. The day you marry Miss Bridget,

the Gaffer here will dower ye both wi' your mother's portion and the Warren Farm."

The Gaffer started up in his chair, glaring in fierce protestation ; but before he could say a word George replied—

"I'll take nothing from my father, except what's my own by right. I want neither his gifts nor his blessings, for there 'd be a curse on both. I'm leaving this place for ever, and I shall never see Bridget Thorpe again ; after what has happened, I could never look her in the face."

The Gaffer broke in wildly : "Now, Jarge——"

"Hold *your* tongue, ye Cain !" cried the Shepherd.  
"Come, Mr. George, for Miss Bridget's sake !"

"It's for *her* sake I am going," said George, his face hard set despite the rising tears. "We brought her cruel sorrow and almost death. How could I take her hand in mine, knowing that my father plotted to have her life? Flesh and blood is thicker than water, and, God help me ! I'm flesh and blood of *his*, and the curse of his guilt will be on me till I die. Don't talk to me, man ! Don't say another word ! All I want now is to quit this place for ever !"

Cowed and terrified by this tirade, the Gaffer crouched in his chair, looking in dumb appeal from

one face to the other. George, after all, was his son, and in his own selfish, sordid way he had always recognised the relationship. He saw now clearly the extent of his offence and the hopelessness of reconciliation, and in his abject shame and terror he was almost willing to accede to Jasper's terms.

"Your mind be made up?" asked Jasper, quietly.

"My mind's made up," replied George.

"Then so be mine," said Jasper, rising with an air of determination. "Maybe I was wrong to try to hush up a wicked deed, but now I'll see the guilty punished whate'er befall."

"What'll 'ee do?" cried, almost screamed, the Gaffer. "Jarge, stop him! Don't let him go!"

"I ha' held my tongue till now," said the Shepherd, pausing and looking at George, "thinking, maybe, that ill might be mended, and the little one's trouble healed. But since 'tis as ye say, and all o'er between ye for evermore, there be no call to be silent now. I'll go straight away to the constable to denounce the man that gave poison stuff to Miss Bridget and tried to take her life."

"No, no!" shrieked the Gaffer. "Jarge! Speak to him! Tell him you'll do as he bids 'ee! Tell him you'll wed Bridget! Don't 'ee let him put the

rope round your father's neck—don't 'ee, don't 'ee!"

Without once glancing at his father, George addressed the Shepherd. His voice was low and tremulous, and his look was one of utter despair.

"Say what you will," he said, "but remember you'll only be breaking Bridget's heart. It's for her sake, not my father's, that I warn you to think again. You know well that I *can't* wed Bridget with this secret on my soul; and besides my shame to come between us, there's her sister's hate."

"There be no hate between them now," returned Jasper. "Miss Catherine and she are thick and loving, as they ha' always been. Come, lad, do as you'd be done by—what's past can ne'er be whistled back, and why should young and innocent folk suffer for an old man's sin?"

Instead of answering, George sank into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, wept in silence. His sadly burdened heart had overflowed at last.

The two men watched him silently—Jasper with infinite pity, the Gaffer with increased hope and eagerness, for in his eyes all such melting was a sign of defeat.

The candle had burnt so low that the room was in semi-darkness. The rain pattered on the window



292 *"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."*

pane with increased force, and the rising wind began to whistle shrilly past the house.

When the silence was at last broken, it was by the opening of the door, and the appearance of another person on the threshold of the room.

Catherine Thorpe, pale as death, and dripping wet from the storm.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CATHERINE.

O frail Love ! O pale Love ! O Love once bright and warm,  
You crouched beneath my cottage porch and watch the weary  
storm,

The rain beats on your naked breast and soaks your wings of gold,  
And like a mortal child you droop and shiver in the cold.

O pale Love ! O frail Love ! what is that ye see  
Out in the night ? A bridal wreath, or funeral flowers for me ?  
I wait and weary here within, and hear you stir out there,  
Yet fear to ope the door and hear the message that you bear.

*Songs of the Fells.*

"MISS CATHERINE !" cried the Shepherd, startled by the sudden apparition, while George raised his head in amazement, and the Gaffer trembled as if his last hour had come.

Pallid and breathless, with the raindrops streaming down her face, and her great eyes full of strange light, the mistress of the farm looked as if she had come upon some terrible errand. At a glance she noted the agony of the young man, but the look she cast upon him was without tenderness or pity ; then she gazed at the Gaffer, and her face grew harder still.

"Nowt has happened, Miss Catherine?" asked Jasper, while she paused upon the threshold.

She shook her head, closed the door, and walked slowly into the room. As she came nearer, the Gaffer shrunk up in his chair, thinking, "She knows everything, and I'm a lost man." But suddenly, to the astonishment of all present, she forced a laugh, and throwing off her dripping cloak, looked wildly from one to another.

"Did you take me for a ghost?" she said. "Nothing has happened; nothing is going to happen! Only I came over to have a talk with George!"

At the mention of his name, the young man rose to his feet and passed his hand across his face, while the Shepherd, approaching Catherine, touched her lightly on the arm.

"What is it, Miss Catherine?" he said softly.

She glanced at him and laughed again, this time very nervously, but made no reply. Meantime the Gaffer had risen too, and was waiting the issue with an air in which dread of consequences and obsequiousness were curiously blent.

Then suddenly, with a wild flying flicker, the candle went out, and the room was completely dark.

The darkness gave Catherine courage, and she spoke again.

"I sent for you, George. Why did you not come?"

No answer.

"Can't ye speak, *you*?" snarled the Gaffer, shuffling across the room and stumbling as he went; but still not a word. In the dead silence that ensued they could hear the Gaffer groping in the cupboard for another candle, which he lighted as he held in his hand, and then, returning to the table, stuck it into the warm socket of the old candlestick. Then, in the dim light, they saw Catherine still standing erect and pale.

"A fine welcome," she said, in a low voice that betrayed increasing agitation. "Is the man dumb? Well, I came here to talk to him, and talk to him I will!" and, so saying, she sat down in the chair vacated by Jasper.

"That's right, that's right!" piped old Kingsley, trembling like a leaf. "You're kindly welcome, Miss Catherine and my son Jarge——"

She interrupted him instantly, with a wave of the hand and a flash of her scornful eyes.

"What I've got to say must be said to neither you

nor to any man but George alone. Leave us together! Leave us, d' ye hear? for if *you* speak another word to me I shall go as I came."

The Gaffer gasped and clutched the table, while George stepped forward and spoke for the first time.

"What do you wish to say to me?" he asked.

"I'll tell you that when we're alone," she answered, "Jasper, get you gone!—you're not wanted here; and as for *you*" (again she looked at the Gaffer), "out of sight and out of hearing, if you please!"

The Gaffer hesitating, Jasper gripped him by the arm.

"Hereaway wi' me," he said, and he drew the old man to the door, pushed him before him, and followed him into the darkness of the storm.

A long pause ensued. George waited, his face set hard in pain, while Catherine, her eyes fixed upon the floor, fought as if for breath, her colour coming and going, her right hand raised from time to time to her parched lips.

At last she spoke.

"There's been trouble enough between us all, and I want to set it right. It's not for your sake or mine I've come here, but for Bridget's; my back's strong

enough to bear its load, and so, perhaps, is yours. And don't think I'm hard or angry—that's all over now ; but at first—at first—I hated you and yours with a bitter hate, and thought that forgiveness would never come."

She had got thus far, when her smothered emotion almost mastered her, and she paused, as if choking, her eyes dim with tears.

"Don't say another word !" cried George.

"Nay, you shall hear me out !" she said, conquering herself in a moment. "You've *got* to hear me, George Kingsley, and take back the evil things you've thought and said of me. I've humbled myself in coming here, but I'll humble myself more if you like, for Bridget's sake. I've brought you a message from her—will you hear it?"

"If you wish it, Catherine."

"It's not what *I* wish or *you* wish," she answered, almost fiercely, "but what is right and just before God. You thought I wanted to part you—you thought (God forgive you !) that I hated my sister enough to wish her dead—more than that, enough to take her life !"

George stood thunderstruck, for it became clear to him in a moment that Catherine had no suspicion of

the truth. His first thought, upon her sudden appearance, had been that she had learned everything, and her manner to his father had confirmed that impression; but now it was obvious that he had been mistaken.

"What are you saying?" he exclaimed. "No such cruel thoughts ever entered my head. I knew that you loved Bridget. I knew——"

"Don't lie to me!" she cried. "Don't make bad worse, and shame me more and more! You cursed my house—you swore never again to come beneath my roof—that you were sick and shamed to come there, after what I'd thought and done."

"Who has told you this?" asked George, with increasing consternation. "You needn't answer, for I know—it was Geoffrey. Yes, I *did* say that—I *did* say that after what had happened I could not come again; but I meant—I meant—oh, don't ask me what I meant, but I swear before God that I was thinking no evil of *you*! Geoffrey mistook me—the curse I called was not on your roof, but mine! The hand that parted us was not yours, Catherine, but another's—and—and——"

As he hesitated in horror, there was a cry and a struggle at the door, and a figure, wild and rain-

bedraggled, tottered into the room. It was the Gaffer, holding out his hand, and moaning in despair—

"Hold your tongue, Jarge! Hold your tongue! Don't 'ee lie again your father! agin your own flesh and blood!"

How find a simile to describe the miserable old man, now rendered half mad with shame and dread. Like a raven half drowned, with dank and ruffled plumage, or like an animated scarecrow after a long day of rain, or like anything else hideous and degraded and woebegone, stood the Gaffer, shivering and mumbling and croaking in a very agony of despair. Catherine looked at him, looked at George, looked back again at the Gaffer. Then all the truth dawned on her, or rather struck her like a blow.

She sprang to her feet and clutched the Gaffer by the arm; he recoiled and cowered.

"My God!" she cried. "Then it was *you!* *you!*"

And upon the very words, and the horrified gesture which accompanied them, the Gaffer collapsed like a house of cards, tumbled incontinently on the floor, and looking up thence with imploring little eyes, seemed to await his doom.

Catherine turned to George.



300 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"And *you* knew it?" she demanded.

Without speaking, George bowed his head. It was now Catherine's turn to collapse; with a sharp cry of horror she fell back, but George caught her and placed her gently in a chair. Then, as she lay there half swooning, Jasper the shepherd entered, and, kneeling by her, while George bent over her, took her by the hand.

"Don't 'ee grieve, Miss Catherine!" he said tenderly. "It be all for the best, and 'tis well ye know; soon or late 'twas bound to come out, for evil things they rot and fill the wholesome air. 'Twas from *me* that old Cain got the poison stuff—he swore 'twas to kill a poor hound—but 'twas thy sister Bridget he thought to kill! Ay, and he would ha' killed her, *me* not by!"

"I understand," moaned Catherine, shuddering. "I understand!" And strangely enough, as her senses gathered the truth in all its fulness, relief came to her, and her tears began to flow. Hideous as it all was, it was less terrible to her than the thought that George had thought her so infinitely base. She wept and wept now, like a child.

Meantime, the Gaffer, gathering his old bones together, crawled into a corner, rose, and stood peer-

ing wildly at the group ; then, in a new access of terror, he groped his way to the door, where he paused again, his lean limbs giving way beneath him, and clung desperately struggling to the latch ; finally, with a feeble croak, he plunged out into the darkness and disappeared.

"Let him go !" muttered Jasper. "The rain 'll help wash the smut off his wretched soul ! Look up, Miss Catherine. Ye know now why this poor lad was too shamed and heartbroken to face you and yourn. Tell him you forgive him, Missie, tell him that !"

With a heavy sigh, Catherine reached up her hand and placed it for a moment in that of George's, then, shuddering again, she struggled to her feet.

"I'll go home now," she said in a low voice. "Come, Jasper !"

"Nay, nay," said the Shepherd. "There be more yet to say and do. Don't 'ee think o' your old man, but of the poor wench as suffer'd so sore through his misdeeds."

But here George broke in firmly but decisively—

"Catherine is right," he said. "She knows well that I must suffer for my father's sin. He is my father, 'spite of all, and the stain on him is a stain on *me*.

302 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

I'll only ask Catherine one last favour—to hold her peace and to spare the old man for my sake."

"I'll do that, George," she answered. "Bridget must never know."

"Don't 'ee count on that," said the Shepherd. "Maybe the little one has a guess already; for how could she be *off* guessing, know how it all happened, and how as the Gaffer gave her the stuff to drink? She knows, Miss Catherine, but she's been silent for George's sake!"

This was a new light on the situation, and a keen one. Without replying, Catherine turned from the two men and crossed to the window, looking out into the darkness of the night. She stood thus for some time, her face unseen, thinking it all over. Minute by minute she grew more resolved and strong; and at last, when she turned and spoke, her face was calm, and all traces of pain seemed gone.

"George," she said, holding out her hand.

"Yes, Catherine," he answered, taking her hand in his.

Then, gently drawing her hand away, she continued—

"You must hear Bridget's message now. It's this—that she loves you still with her whole heart, and

begs that you will come to her and be friends once more."

This speech was a little sophistical, for poor Bridget had said nothing of the kind in words. Catherine, indeed, was only interpreting her sister's will and wish, which she knew so well.

"I believe that Jasper has spoken the truth," she continued, while George stood silent in despair. "Bridget guesses everything, but nothing can change her heart. Only one man can comfort her and make her happy, and that's the man she has loved from the beginning. Promise to come to her—promise to make her your wife."

"My wife!" cried George. "After what has passed! After my father——"

"Your father's guilt is not yours," replied Catherine. "The curse he thought to bring you may become a blessing. And after all the Gaffer's more like a madman than a sane Christian soul, and maybe all this will melt his heart and change him before he goes to face his Maker. So listen, George! I've told you one errand that brought me here to-night, but there's another. When Bridget and you marry, it will be share and share alike with her and me. I always meant it so. She'll have half my money and half my

304 " *COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE.*"

land to set up housekeeping, and if you do as I've said, why, then, I'll throw my blessing in ! "

As she ended, her face wore the ghost of its old smile, and she held out her hand again.

Half an hour later, Catherine walked slowly home, escorted by the old Shepherd.

The rain still fell fitfully, but the wind had risen to half a south-west gale, and through the driving clouds appeared the waning moon. For the first time after many days Catherine felt at peace with herself and with the world. The knowledge that George had never misunderstood or despised her, added to the consciousness of her own supreme self-sacrifice, brought a sense of rest, sad yet happy, like that we feel after we have stood by a holy deathbed and witnessed the passing away of some beautiful soul.

And the deathbed by which this woman had stood was that of her own love, her first love, and perchance her last. She knew now that it was all over, that the love she mourned would never arise again, that night-time and daytime it would be something to remember with solemn tears. It was dead, quite dead. The earth would close over it, and the grass and

flowers would cover it, and Bridget and George would stand above it, as above a quiet grave.

All the stormy passion had ebbed from her heart ; she even wondered now that it had ever flowed there. As she had looked into George's face that night, and held his hand, she had felt no tremor of the old yearning. He seemed to her only her sister's lover and future husband, that was all. Had there been no Bridget to stand between them, she could have parted from him without a sigh. As she gazed up to the moon, and thought of the madness that had passed, she felt that she was not only purified but heart-whole.

She had settled it all with George Kingsley. He had sworn, if the shame of his father's crime could be hidden, and if Bridget's heart was unchanged, to become her husband. Not without a struggle had he yielded to his own happiness, but, conquered by Catherine's magnanimity, he had given his assent.

Through the dark lanes they walked on, until they came close to the farm where Bridget lay asleep. Then Jasper, parting with his mistress, bent his head before her as before some holy woman.

"God has strengthen'd 'ee, Miss Catherine !" he

306 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

said gently. "He's taught 'ee His own charm to bring forgetfulness. May His blessing rest for ever on you and yourn."

And he left her at the threshold, with a solemn "Good-night!"

It was close on midnight as she entered the kitchen, where a lamp was dimly burning. A figure, seated in 'the ingle, looked up as she closed the door behind her.

"Geoffrey!" she exclaimed, recognising him. "What brings you here at this hour?"

"I was waiting for you," was the reply. "I found the door open and the light burning, and I knew you were not a-bed."

She took off her damp cloak and hung it up, as he continued—

"'Tis no weather for you to be wandering out so late. I doubt you're wet through."

"I'd business out yonder with George Kingsley and his father. I found Jasper there, and he brought me home. 'Tis all settled now—George and Bridget are to be man and wife."

She spoke lightly and with an assumption of content, but she was nervous before the eyes which she knew were fixed wonderingly upon her. She remem-

bered, too, the events of that day and the part which Geoffrey had taken in them.

Geoffrey rose with a sigh, not daring to question her as to what had occurred.

"I'll go, now I've seen you safe; 'tis late, and you must be tired out."

"Nay, I'm not sleepy," she answered, smiling. "Sit down a bit if you've a mind."

And she drew up a chair and sat down herself. Geoffrey, however, remained standing, his back to the ingle, looking down upon her.

Then, partly to relieve her own embarrassment, she told him how she had made it all up with the Kingsleys, and had promised to dower her sister with half she possessed. Not a word did she speak of the dreadful secret, or of the scene which had taken place at the Warren Farm; she thought all that was sacred, even from Geoffrey.

He listened quietly, nodding approval of all her plans, asking no questions, expressing no doubts or misgivings. His heart was too full of its own yearning: he was too happy in the presence of the woman who was all his world. But when she had finished, he said, in a low voice, not looking into her face—

"I was sure it would end so, Catherine, for I knew



308 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

you better than you knew yourself. But when Bridget weds George and takes half the money and half the land, what will become of you? Will you bide here still on the old farm, or go and dwell with *them*?"

"I've never thought of that," she answered. "But no, man and wife are best alone! Maybe—no," she added, with a forced laugh, "I shall stay here as before, and farm the land, with you for my right-hand man."

Geoffrey sighed and shook his head.

"I fear that can't be. It's been on my mind for many a day to say what I came to say to-night. I must leave the farm and find another home—maybe over seas."

"Leave the farm!" she echoed. "Leave me *now*, when I most want a friend! You'll never do that, Geoffrey!"

"I *must*," he said; "I think I should go mad if I stayed here!"

And with these words all the long pent-up passion of his soul broke loose; his voice trembled, his eyes grew dim, and his limbs shook beneath him. Startled by the change in his tone, she looked up and saw that his face was contracted as if with mental pain.

"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE." 309

"What ails you, Geoffrey? Are you ill?"

It was a foolish question, for she knew as well as he what ailed him. Ever since her meeting with Jasper on the Weald she had known it, and had often thought it over to herself. Her own great sufferings, also, helped her to understand those of the man who all his life had been devoted to her—so that when, after a pause, he spoke again, her heart responded sadly to every word—

"Don't think, Catherine, that I want to add one straw to the heavy load you've had to bear. I'm your friend still, your faithful friend till death; but I built too much on my own strength, and now I feel that I'm only a coward, who must run away. You know why Catherine—you *must* know why! You cannot have been so blind for all these years! I'm a fool for my pains, I know, but I've loved you all my life!"

He paused, and she was silent. Then he went on—

"It was like death to me to see you taking your love to another man; yet, God knows, if it could have been I'd have placed you in that man's arms and been your friend and brother still!"

"I know that, Geoffrey," she answered, touched to the soul by his devotion.

"And when I saw *your* death-struggle, so like my

own, I prayed God to comfort you, to bring you peace. Well, the Lord has heard my prayer—you've done by your flesh and blood as I'd have done by *you*. But what I've borne once, I shall never be able to bear again. Another man will come—another man will be to you what George was once—and so, after all, 'tis better I should go."

"Geoffrey!" she cried, holding out her hand.

"Yes, Catherine."

"I shall never play the fool again—I'm cured for ever of all that. Don't leave me! stay with me! I've no friend in all the world but *you*!"

He bent over her, took her hand, and kissed it tenderly; while, turning her face away, she wept in silence.

It was indeed as she had said: in all the world she had but one friend, and he was by her side; but the deadness of the old passion was too heavy on her soul for her to think of love. Geoffrey was her brother, nothing more.

Still holding her hand in his, he spoke again—

"And there's another thing, Catherine—I can't bear to see you suffer. I know well that you can never care for any other man as you have cared for George; for 'tis my own heart tells me—love like that never

comes twice in a lifetime. And I'm not so mean and far-gone as to think that you could ever care for *me*. I should never have asked *that*! To remain by your side, to watch over you, to be your servant, would have been enough, so long as no other came to win what I could never hope to gain."

"Let it be like that, then!" she cried eagerly. "Never, never, never shall I care for any other! Ah, you needn't be afraid!"

He drew his hand away, and placed it softly on the head that was bowed before him.

"There's more sorts of love than one, maybe," he said. "It isn't in Nature that you should live alone, and another sort of love will come. God never made one so pretty to live without love at all!"

So pretty! Had any other man spoken the word, she would have thought he mocked her. Even from Geoffrey the epithet seemed strange and far-fetched.

"Nay, nay, Geoffery," she said, with a faint hysterical laugh; "I'm none of your pretty ones. All the world knows I'm coarse and common—the stuff that old maids are fashioned of."

His hand moved softly over her hair, with a touch of benediction.

312 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

"You're better than pretty, Catherine—you're *beautiful* as a summer day!"

She turned, still laughing, and looked into his eyes. What a depth of passionate tenderness was there! Yes, it was true; he was in earnest. In his eyes, at least, she was beautiful and fair—something to bend down to and to worship. It was a new experience to be so loved, and it brought with it a wondering pleasure. The warm blood mantled her cheeks under that ardent gaze.

"Promise to stay!" she murmured. "Give me time—some day, perhaps—some day——"

His answer was to take her face between his two strong hands, and to kiss her gently on the forehead.

"I'll do as you bid me," he said. "God bless you, Catherine!"

And he walked out into the night, happier than he had ever been, or had hoped to be.



"YOU'RE BETTER THAN PRETTY, CATHERINE—YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL  
AS A SUMMER DAY!"—Page 312.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE HOME-COMING OF LOVERS.

O bright Love! O white Love! still beauteous and divine;  
You've waited for the night to pass and for the dawn to shine,  
But now you lift the latch and look with merry face on me,  
While all the birds begin to sing their morning melodie.

O fair Love! O rare Love! the light of morning grows;  
There's golden rain on leafy boughs and dew upon the rose;  
The Earth is smiling thro' her tears on every living thing,  
And I am laughing like a child to hear the news you bring.

*Songs of the Fells.*

LEFT alone on the farm, George Kingsley sat pondering for a long time over the events of that night. Although he had yielded to Catherine's entreaties, and had promised to see Bridget the next day, his heart was still troubled, and he still felt the bitter sense of shame. Hours passed by, and he still sat brooding over the future and the past. Then, when it was long past midnight, he remembered the lateness of the hour, and realised that his father had not returned.

He walked to the door and looked out.

The wind was higher than ever, but the rain was



still falling ; cloud after cloud, as it passed over the moon, melted into faint luminous film and fell in feeble showers.

What could keep the old man ? Where could he be wandering or hiding ? He was, as a rule, one who went to bed betimes, and rose with the lark ; and to be still abroad at such an hour and in such weather was indeed a new and wild departure.

After all, he was George's father, and not even a crime so horrible as that which he had contemplated could dissolve the bond of flesh and blood. Amid all the young man's loathing had arisen a subtle sense of pity ; for, indeed, the Gaffer's agony and terror had been accompanied with such strange manifestations of both mental and physical disturbance that even a harder heart than George's might have been touched.

Perhaps he was hiding in some of the out-buildings ? To ascertain if this were the case, George walked round, and called his father again and again by name. No voice responded.

Growing more and more uneasy every moment, he wandered on towards the cony-haunted fields which surrounded the house and gave it its name. The wind howled and the rain fell, with intervals of

dim moonlight and total darkness. The young man's terror deepened. He was convinced now that some accident must have happened.

"Father, are you there?" he cried again and again into the darkness.

Walking rapidly this way and that, uncertain which direction to take, he came upon the stagnant pond into which the Gaffer, after his interview with Jasper, had cast the fatal phial, and as he was turning away from it, he stumbled over a human figure lying huddled up on the ground. With a terrified exclamation, he bent down, and found what he had been seeking—his father, limp and motionless as if dead.

He lifted him up, and, raising him towards the moonlight, which just then shone out clearly, saw that the face was black and distorted, the eyes glaring vacantly, the mouth covered with foam. His first thought was that the old man had expired. A breath, a faint motion of the limbs, showed that he still lived. Trembling and horror-stricken, he laid him down, knelt by him, and tried to restore him to consciousness, in vain.

Then all grew dark, and heavy rain fell. Determined to get the stricken creature to shelter as soon

as possible, he raised the Gaffer in his strong arms, and staggered with him towards the house.

The load was a light one—only a little flesh and a few old bones, but he tottered beneath its weight. Fortunately he had not far to go, and before many minutes had passed he had reached the farm kitchen, and set down his load in the old arm-chair, which the Gaffer had occupied so many years.

There lay the old man, a confused and helpless heap, more dead than living. It was clear now that he had been seized by some sort of fit. His face was drawn to one side and bloated with blood, his arms and limbs hung limply, and his eyeballs did not contract in the light of the candle.

Searching in the cupboard, George found some brandy, kept in an old physic bottle as a precious "medicine"; and with this he moistened the lifeless lips, managing at the same time to pour a little down the throat. The Gaffer still remained unconscious, but his breathing became heavier and more perceptible.

At his wits' end what to do next, George finally decided to bear the old man up to bed. This he did, struggling with his burden up the narrow stairs, until he reached the sleeping-chamber. Then he ran

downstairs and brought up the light, after which he placed his father on the bed, stripped him of his outer raiment, shoes and stockings, and arranged the pillows beneath his head. There the Gaffer lay, as sorry a wreck of humanity as was ever beheld by human eyes.

The cottages where the farm-labourers dwelt were situated at some little distance, and George did not dare to leave the bedside. From time to time he administered more brandy, still without avail. When the grey dawn broke, the old man still lay unconscious, a waif floating miserably between two tides, that of Life and that of Death.

At early morning a labourer crossed the yard, and George sang out to him to run at once for Dutton. It was broad daylight before the man of science arrived. The moment he saw the patient he shook his head.

"Cerebral effusion, strong enough to knock down an ox! He's warm, and that's all," said Dutton.

"Will he live?" asked George, eagerly, feeling for the first time in his life a tender interest in the author of his being, and looking at the bed through rising tears. Yes, that poor wreck of a living man

was his *father*, and it was pitiful to see him cast so low.

"He may and he mayn't," answered Dutton. "I wouldn't give tuppence for his life myself. Put some warm bottles to his feet, and I'll send him some physic."

"He's stirring," cried George, suddenly.

And at that moment, indeed, a gleam of consciousness came into the wrinkled face, and the foam-flecked lips moved as if striving for utterance. Dutton bent over him, lifted his right arm, and then released it; it fell limp and powerless on the bed.

"Hemiplegia!" muttered Dutton. "He may linger a bit, but he's an old man, and he'll never rise again."

But the Gaffer was of a tough breed, hard to kill. A few weeks afterwards he had recovered sufficiently to be carried downstairs and to occupy his old seat by the fire. Yet, although the withered body retained a portion of its old life, the power of speech had almost gone, and the keen eyes were glassy and dim.

The news of the Gaffer's collapse soon spread far and wide, and caused, to tell the truth, little or no

lamenting. George, however, watched and nursed the invalid as if he had been the best, not the worst, of fathers.

Then, one day, after a few meetings out-o'-doors, Catherine and Bridget came over, and Bridget asked permission to sit now and then with the old man. At first George refused peremptorily, but Bridget said :

"Let bygones be bygones, George. He's *your* father!" And George realised then, by her manner, that she knew the truth, that, as Jasper had affirmed, she had guessed it from the first.

When she first entered the kitchen, the Gaffer, lying propped up by pillows, made no sign of recognition, so that what George most dreaded, a convulsion of feeling at the sight of the pretty creature whom the Gaffer had so hated, did not take place. He did not know her, indeed he hardly knew anyone except his son ; but gradually, from day to day, as Bridget's visits increased, he seemed to take pleasure in her presence, and to be dimly aware of her as of some gentle nurse.

And thus, for the first time in his life, the egregious and impossible Gaffer, once the terror of friends and enemies alike, became an object of human interest. Surely a miracle indeed !

A year has passed away, and Amanda and Jabez are seated again under the shelter of a tree, in a corner of the hayfield. It is the noontide siesta, or, to speak more properly, the noontide siesta is just over, and already the mowers are busy yonder in the sunshine.

"Amandy ! "

"Yes, Jabez ! "

"Where's Measter Jarge ? "

"Coming o'er the meadow yonder with the young mistress. Eh, but she looks bonnie ! Happy is the bride as the sun shines on ! "

"Wedlock's a vulish thing ! " said Jabez, with a grin.

"And men be vulish creatures ! " returned Amanda, holding up a big fat hand on which a golden ring was gleaming.

"How many days since young mistress was married, *you* ? "

"Why, a whole month, ye dumbledore. Just a month after the Gaffer died ! "

"And you and *me* ? "

"Twenty year, to my counting ! " returned Amanda, throwing a bunch of hay into the man's face ; whereupon he caught her round the waist and kissed her with a smack of hearty enjoyment.

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 321

Just then, as if Time had rolled back again, and it was a year ago, the gate of the field opened, and Geoffrey Doone rode in on his roadster.

"Quiet, ye vule! There's Measter Geoffrey!"

And as Geoffrey rode up, Amanda jumped to her feet and curtsied low. Jabez rose too, and touched his forelock.

"Idle as ever!" said Geoffrey, with a sunny smile.

"I thought wedlock would have cured you!"

Jabez grinned.

"Lord love 'ee, Measter Geoffrey, wedlock be a cure for many thing, but none a cure for that!"

"Have you seen Miss Catherine?" he asked.

"She's out yonder in the five-acre," answered Amanda, whereupon Geoffrey nodded lightly and rode on.

Jabez watched him until he was out of earshot, then, scratching his head, and winking at Amanda, he observed—

"Miss Catherine! allays Miss Catherine! I doubt there'll be another couple o' vules before long."

"Sure enough," returned Amanda. "'Twas bound to happen," and tying on her sun-hat she strode away across the fields, followed by her liege lord.

Geoffrey found Catherine busy among the hay-



makers—the same simple Catherine, brown with the sun and full of sunny health. She saw him coming, and ran to his horse's side.

"So George and Bridget have come back?" he said gaily.

"Yes, and brought good weather and good luck with them. There they are!"

The young couple, hand in hand like children, were moving thither across the field—Bridget, dainty and well-dressed as ever, George in a dark summer-suit. The moment they appeared, the haymakers gave them a hearty cheer. Bridget blushed and, running to her sister, kissed her fondly, while George and Geoffrey shook hands.

The four chatted together for a time, then George and his bride strolled away. Catherine still remained by Geoffrey, her hand resting on the horse's mane.

"They're happy, thank God!" said Geoffrey. "And now that they're to dwell over yonder at the Warren, what's to become of *you*?"

Catherine laughed and blushed.

"Oh, I shall be all right! I've got the farm to look after still, and winter and summer plenty of work to do. I shall live on just as I've lived, unless ——"

*"COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."* 323

"Unless?" asked Geoffrey, bending forward in the saddle, and looking into her eyes.

"Unless," she replied, answering the look, "unless there's some foolish man in the world who thinks he cares for me, and who'll take me for my own sake, with all my faults!"

The face of Geoffrey grew radiant as a sunbeam. He placed his hand on hers, and said in a low voice, broken between laughter and tears—

"I wonder, Catherine, if there's such a man?"

L'ENVOI.

"Come, live with me, and be my Love!"

The Shepherd singeth as of old;  
Across the fells his white flocks move  
Close to the shelter of the Fold;  
The sun shines bright, the wind blows free,  
All's green beneath, and blue above . . .  
O hark, again  
That old refrain!—  
"Come, live with me! Come, live with me!  
Come, live with me, and be my Love!"

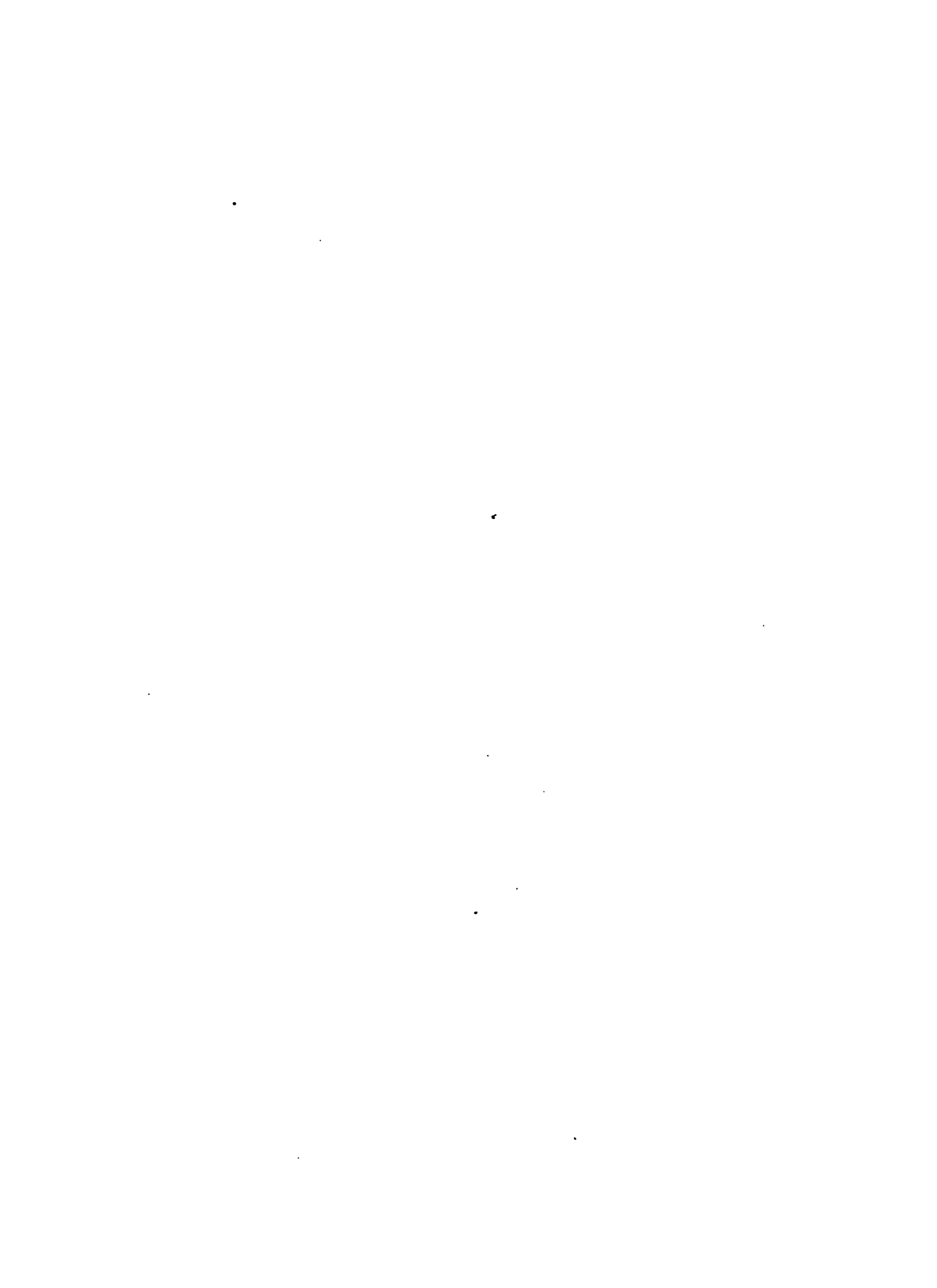
Sweet music of the beating heart,  
Help'd softly by the faltering tongue,  
Still heard where lovers meet or part,  
For ever old, yet ever young!  
Old as the Mountains and the Sea,  
Young as each Dawn that breaks above! . . .

324 "COME, LIVE WITH ME, AND BE MY LOVE."

Again, again,  
The Shepherd's strain :  
" Come, live with me ! Come, live with me !  
Come, live with me, and be my Love ! "

This is the Song Time cannot still,  
This is the Life that ever springs,  
This is the Joy that ne'er grows chill,  
But warms all Earth and living things ;  
This is the Charm that still shall be  
Wherever mortals live and move ! . . .  
O, hark again,  
That sweet refrain—  
" Come, live with me ! Come, live with me !  
Come, live with me, and be my Love ! "

THE END.







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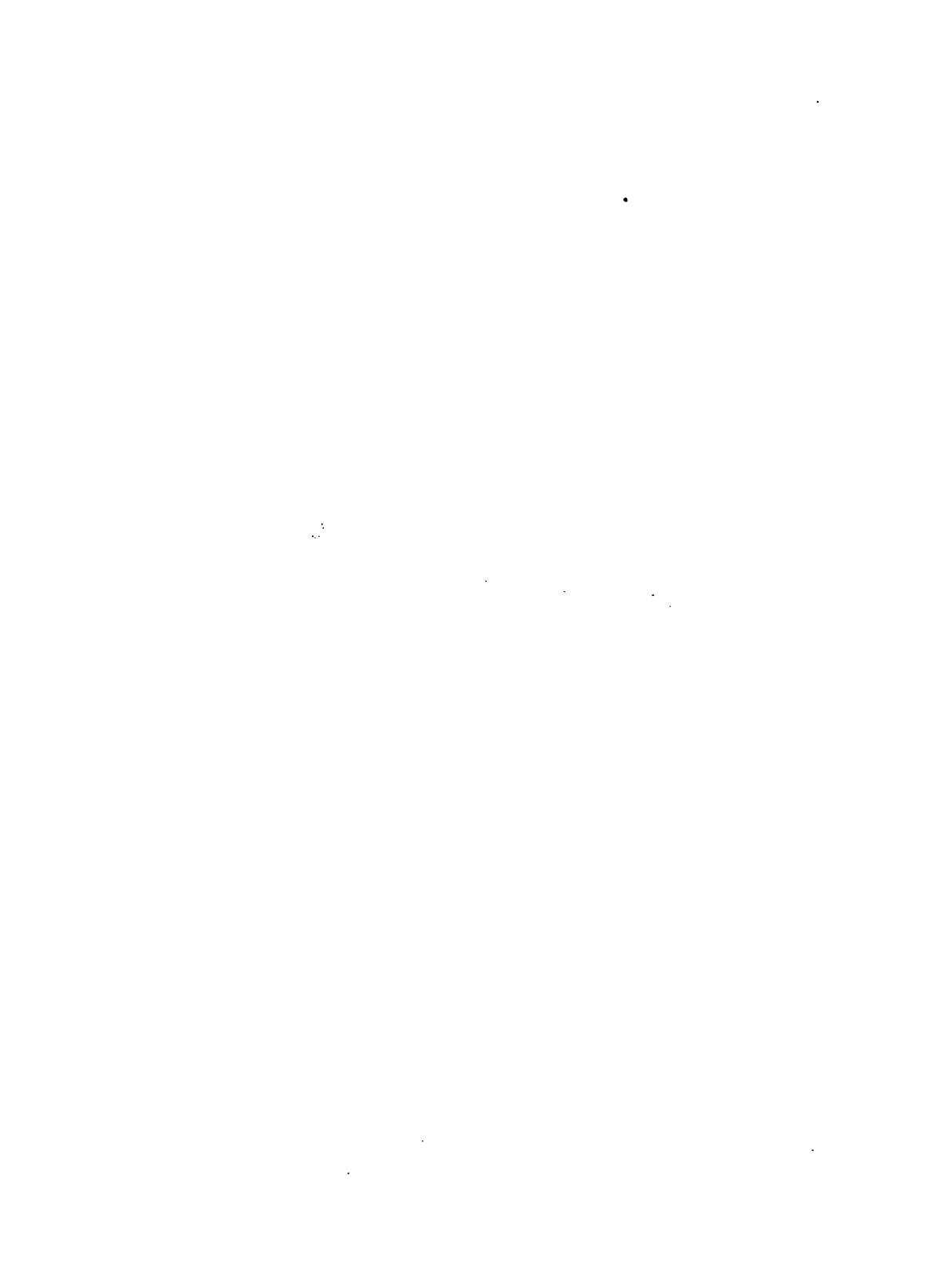
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